



INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE
IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS

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ICSF'S JOURNEY WITH

WOMEN IN FISHERIES





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The text below is written by those who participated actively in the ICSF-WIF programme. The reflections are personal.

AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

NALINI NAYAK WITH INPUTS FROM CORNELIE QUIST

In June 2010, ICSF preceded its triannual general body meeting with a symposium on **“Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities”**. That symposium saw the participation of a wide range of women and men from different regions of the world, representing women leaders of fisher communities, non-governmental organization (NGO) activists, academics and policymakers of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

The interesting aspect about that symposium, which took place 20 years after the start of the **ICSF Women in Fisheries (WIF) programme**, was that both the presentations by the community women leaders and the conceptual review of literature highlighted the fact that despite an increase in the visibility of women in fisheries, their spaces in fisheries and their ability to influence decisions have not grown significantly. In fact, even the conceptual shift in international discourse from political economy to political ecology,

¹ As part of ICSF's participatory history documentation process



while highlighting the environmental implications of development in the context of sustainable fisheries, also obscures the role of women in fisheries. But that fact did not dampen the spirits of those who were present at the 2010 symposium as the network had expanded and women were still willing to creatively and constructively engage in pursuing an agenda for sustainable fisheries on which their livelihoods depended.

It has taken FAO a quarter of a century to seriously focus on a standard for small-scale fisheries since the demand was raised at the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters in Rome in 1984. It has taken as long for us in ICSF to collectively agree on the importance of a gendered perspective in fisheries – despite the fact that the crucial role of women in fisheries has been recognized from the very beginning. In fact, one of the papers presented at a plenary in Rome in 1984 addressed the role of women in fisheries. That focus came from India, where hundreds of women were working in fisheries. As the 1984 conference did not specifically invite women from fishing communities to participate and as it did not devote a specific space to discuss women’s contribution to fisheries, the women present then at Rome initiated a discussion of their own.



WOMEN CLEANING HARVESTED RESOURCES IN COSTA RICA

I recall that the wives of two small-scale fishermen from France who had ‘accompanied their husbands’ to the meeting actually cried while reluctantly talking about their lives...Yes, I say “reluctantly” because while the Asian and African women were articulate and shared their experiences easily, the French women had to be coaxed to speak out. They felt they were just ‘wives’ of the fishers and, I guess, had never been in a fisheries forum where they were also expected to express an opinion. When they spoke, tears ran down their cheeks. Not only did they

miss their husbands who were out at sea for several weeks at a time, at great risk, but they also felt the heavy burden of having to manage all the land-based activities and childcare single-handedly. A woman fish vendor from Quilon (now Kollam), in the south Indian State



of Kerala, much poorer and less educated than her French sisters, reached out to them, saying: *“Don’t cry, we have more courage and strength than the men, we can change things if we stand together”*.

Subsequently, things changed substantially when Cornelia Quist and I began to pay attention to this subject. At ICSF’s first European conference in Lisbon in 1987, co-organized by Pierre Gillet and Cornelia, the latter took the trouble to identify women of fishworker organizations and community women’s organizations who would participate. 'Women in Fisheries' was also given a special session at the conference.

It has been a long, but non-stop, journey since then for the women in ICSF, a determined journey to see that women have a voice in fisheries, that their work and contribution to the sector is made visible and valorised, and that the development of fisheries is in tune with the rhythms of the life-sustaining processes that keep communities and fisheries alive.





ON THE ORIGINS

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, work in the fishing communities of Trivandrum, Kerala, had highlighted for us how women are marginalized in fisheries. The base of the fishworkers' movement was the really small worker-operator fisher. The fish landings were taken to the market by the women, an activity that ensured life and livelihood for thousands of families along the Indian coast. The nets that the fishers used were also being made by the women, which was another source of employment.

It was from that experience of ours that it became evident that there was a need to see how spaces of women in fisheries could be protected as the fisheries had begun to modernize with government support. But that implication was not obvious to the men who desired better fishing equipment like the machine-made nylon nets and eventually motors and better fishing craft. And as costs in fishing thus increased, they also wanted better prices for the fish they caught.



PHILIPPINES WIF CO-ORDINATORS WITH
INTERNATIONAL WIF CO-ORDINATORS, 1993-94

Nevertheless, women had begun to mobilize and participate in the larger struggles within their communities to safeguard the rights of artisanal fishers to fishing and public transport to the markets. It was from these experiences of the fishery being a family enterprise, with a complementary sexual division of labour, that the term 'fishworker' was coined as a new word that went far beyond the construct of the traditional English usage of 'fisherman'.



At the International Conference of Fishworkers and their Supporters in Rome in 1984 and the first triennial conference of ICSF in Bangkok in 1990, I had the opportunity of presenting these issues at the plenaries. With the support of Cornelia, we were able to get a commitment from the General Body to develop a programme on women in fisheries for ICSF. This programme aimed basically at strengthening the role and space of women in fishworker organizations, and defending their spaces in fisheries. But as all of us were voluntary workers in the network, we could only take things forward at our own pace. For a start, in India we developed training modules for fishworkers on integrating the gender component into the analysis of fisheries, highlighting how and why the methods of modern, capital-intensive fishing were violent both on life at sea and on shore, and how they also threw women out of the food chain. (*More details of this analysis can be found in the ICSF SAMUDRA Dossier “Women in Fisheries in India”.*)

Between 1984 and 1994, when the next ICSF conference took place in Cebu in the Philippines, I also had the opportunity of travelling in west Africa with Pierre Gillet and experiencing the large-scale involvement of women in fisheries and observing how the women even financed fishing craft and controlled the trade. They were impressive both in their stature and in the way they intervened in the sector.

I also travelled in some of the fishing areas in France and Spain where the fishing communities were also up in arms against fish trade agreements. Those trips revealed several things about what seemed to be going wrong in the structure of the fishing industry as it became ‘professionalized’. I had heard of the wives of fishermen taking to the streets as their husbands were out of work. They were actually demanding fishing rights in the southern waters. When I met these women, I realized that they were little aware of the fact that there were women like them in the South, in west Africa, who also depended on fish for a livelihood.

Through ICSF and other partners in France, like Pêche et Développement and the Comité Locale, and James Smith at the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development (CCFD), we organized exchange visits of the Northern fishworkers to the Southern fisheries. That was the beginning of not only a new relationship between the communities of the North and the South, but of a new understanding of fisheries and fisheries



agreements as well. The small fishers were in jeopardy even in Europe. Unlike what we in the developing world imagined about the developed West, I realized that the small-scale fishers in Europe were also struggling to keep not only their fisheries alive, but also to convince the society at large that their fishery was just as much a cultural way of life that they wanted to conserve.

Those insights gave us the impetus to plunge ahead, realizing that the model of 'development' in Europe, even as late as the 1980s, was being resisted not only by anti-establishment people like the hippies, but by coastal communities that had managed to negotiate with the modern State to keep their customary practices alive. Ours was, thus, not a mere call from the Southern 'underdeveloped world'.

It was also quite a surprise for me to realize that there still existed a customary law code and legal personnel who were interpreting customary law in France and in Spain. Some of these traditional institutions, like Customary Law Tribunal in France and the *confradias* in Spain, were very male-dominated as similar institutions are in most countries and cultures. But these institutions still accepted the concept of a 'commons' that the community controlled and within which women had their traditional spaces of economic activity.

Nevertheless, both the fishery and the role of women were in jeopardy as the fishery was getting 'professionalized'. There was sufficient evidence to substantiate the analysis that women were being marginalized as the fishery modernized, even though it was still women's invisible labour that kept the small-scale fishery above water.

By that time the infamous Club of Rome had already made dire predictions about the "limits to growth", challenging the extractive development paradigm that then prevailed. Carolyn Merchant, in her 1980 classic work of ecofeminism, **"The Death of Nature"**, highlighted how the extractive development model also took its toll on women and their labour, which gave us a better understanding of how to relate that formulation to how the sea was also being raped and its life processes intercepted.



ICSF OFFICIALLY LAUNCHES THE WIF PROGRAMME

Prior to the second triennial conference of ICSF at Cebu in 1994, Cornelie and I had the opportunity to chalk out a tentative agenda on a Women in Fisheries programme within ICSF. This was preceded by an exploratory visit that the two of us undertook to interact with fishworker leaders, fishing communities and groups involved in organizing fishworkers in India, Thailand, the Philippines and Europe. Cornelie also developed documentation and a bibliography on work on women in fisheries, which was the genesis of the currently large and extensively used ICSF's documentation and bibliography on women in fisheries.

The WIF programme was conceived as an action–research programme that would be executed within, and through, fishers' organizations. For this, we needed to interact with the fishers' organizations and get them on board. Thus, just after the Cebu Conference, we organized a workshop for the leaders (men and some women) of the various fishers' organizations that we had met earlier and thought would be interested in developing such a programme. Aleyamma Vijayan and I shared the analytical framework that we had developed in India on what we called a 'feminist' perspective in fisheries, while Cornelie shared the historical evolution of the different trends in the international women's movement, and the debates and positions highlighting why it was necessary to safeguard the spaces of women in fisheries.

The larger change that was being envisaged was a 'nurture and gender-just fishery'. The women present at the post-Cebu workshop spoke up about their work in fisheries and their marginalization. Besides a couple of participants like Aliou Sall, Antonio Diegues and Alan le Sann, I still recall that the other participants were not really impressed with either of the major inputs. They were considered all too academic or too far-fetched. After all, it



was a daily life struggle within the fisheries, fish stocks were depleting rapidly, the costs of fishing operations were rising, governments were in favour of the big players, and all this talk about women in fisheries seemed superfluous. Nevertheless, from what went on in the group discussions, some of us women organizers felt there was increasing evidence that there was a strong case for putting women in fisheries centre stage. The fishers were open to the idea that their women were important but how and why was still very unclear.

By the end of the workshop, the fisher organizations confirmed their willingness to participate in the WIF programme and so **Bigkis-lakas** in the Philippines, the **Federation of Southern Small-scale Fisherfolk** in Thailand, the **National Fishworkers Forum (NFF)** in India, the **Collective National de Pêcheurs du Senegal (CNPS)** in Senegal, the **Maritime Fishermen's Union (MFU)** in Canada and, in a more peripheral manner, the **Rosa dos Ventos (Wives of Fishermen)** in Spain, and the **Comité Locale de Pêche** in Lorient and Guilvinec and the **local trade union of fish processing workers (CGT)** in Lorient, France, were willing to participate in the programme.

There were very clear long- and short-term objectives and a plan of action but, in essence, the objectives were to strengthen the participation of women in fishworker organizations and in decision-making processes at several levels. Various means would be evolved to develop the creative involvement of women in the production and organizational processes.

Several women like Nenita Cura and her team in the Philippines, Amporn Sugandavanij and Pisit Charnsno, with Jawanit Kittitornkool, in Thailand, Aleyamma Vijayan and a team of women in the NFF in India², Chantal Abord-Hugon and a team of women in the Maritimes in Canada, Aliou Sall and Aminata Wade in Senegal, and some men like Mike Belleveau in Canada and Alain Le Sann, Rene Pierre Chever and James Smith in France, and Pierre Gillet in Belgium, contributed unstintingly to the effort that Cornelie and I co-ordinated. The processes of this programme are documented in detail in the Women in Fisheries SAMUDRA Dossiers and hence they will not be repeated here.

² In the Indian team there were Mercy Alexander in Kerala, Poornima Meher in Maharashtra, Sr. Alphonsa in Tamil Nadu, Jaya in Orissa and Sita in West Bengal.



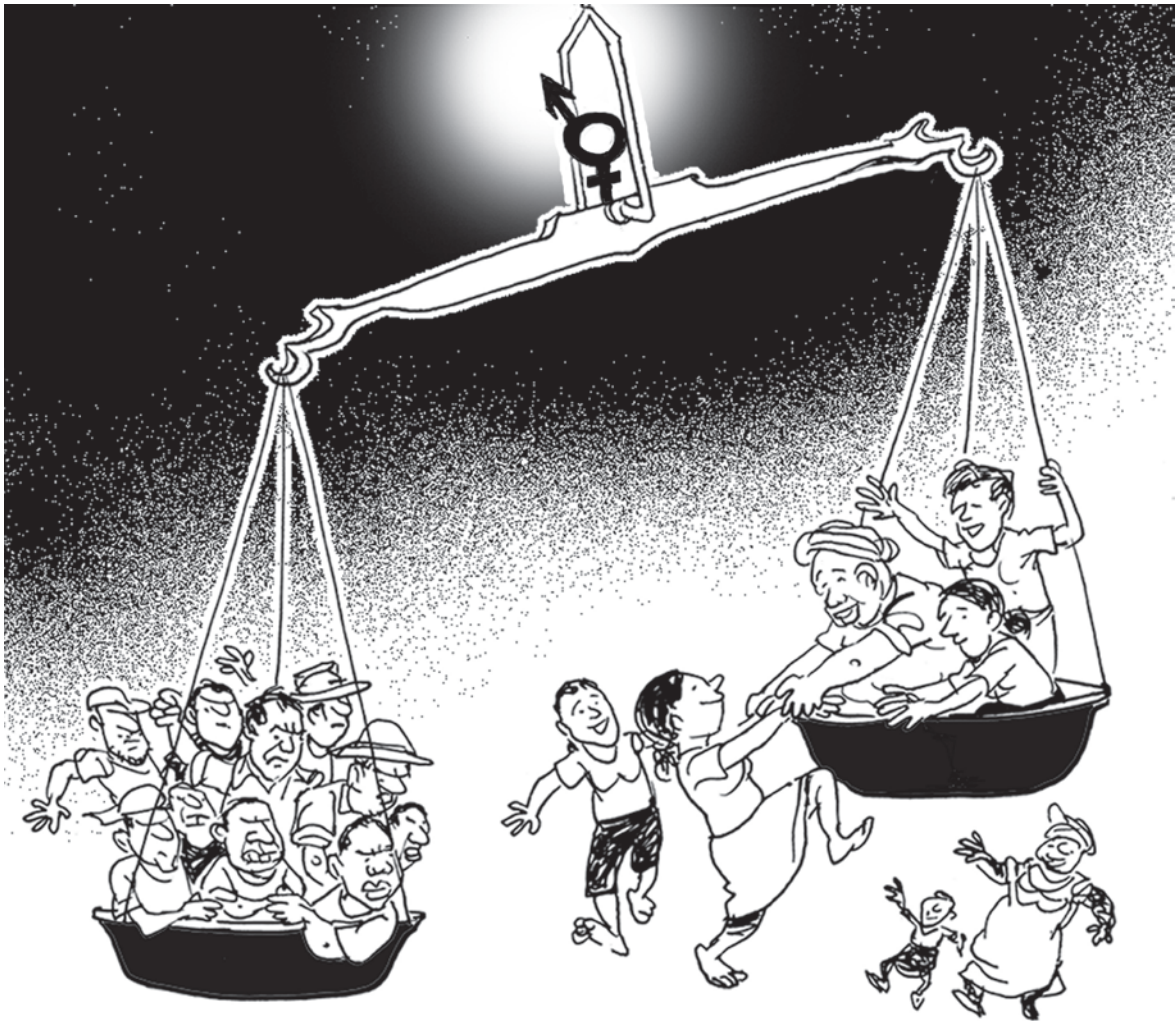
The closing workshop of this first phase of the WIF programme, held in Rufisque, Senegal, in 1996, in which academics like Barbara Neis from Canada and Gabriele Dietrich from India participated, brought into greater focus the issues of globalized fisheries and their impact on women.

Despite the fact that ICSF did engage in several other issues during these years, until about 2000, the WIF programme was the only sustained global intercontinental programme of ICSF that brought fishworkers, academics and activists from different parts of the world together to share experiences, and to discuss the pros and cons of development policies in fisheries in a very multidisciplinary manner, a process in which the ICSF Secretariat also played a vital role.

The nurture focus of the feminist perspective in fisheries linked the environmental and conservation issues to the livelihood and health issues of the communities while also questioning the technology and trade policies of the fishers and the governments. Rising fishing costs and the excessive use of fuel had a direct bearing on the marginalization of small-scale fishers and the entry of larger interests into the fisheries. The detrimental aspects of coastal aquaculture on the lives of communities also led to highlighting the need for coastal zone management.

Even if the fishworker organizations that participated in the programme did not accept entirely the concepts and did not respond to local issues wholeheartedly, the programme undoubtedly did create ripples within and outside the fishing communities. The need for women's visibility, disaggregated data on women, and documentation of women's role in fisheries did get wide acceptance. As women began to get more active, they were also vehemently resisted; in some cases, the men withdrew, conveniently passing the buck on to the women, as it were.





I think it was also the awareness built by the WIF programme that made the NFF state rather arbitrarily, in 1998, that the World Federation of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers would be constituted with a 50 per cent representation of women in its membership. This took the Northern organizations by surprise as none of them had any real women members, being professional member-based organizations, while the Southern organizations were more mass-based organizations in which women participated. This highlighted the rather superficial manner in which the male leadership in India also looked at the 'women's issue'. Nowhere in the NFF in India did the women's real issues get any prominence. Besides the issues that related directly to women, like the right to



transport to, and vending spaces in, the markets, reduction of market taxes (in one State), and the inclusion of women in government welfare programmes, the issue of making fish available for women vendors and keeping locally consumed fish away from the export market was not even given any time for debate – these issues were banished outright. There was, at that time, no chance for women to create their own organizations and get membership in NFF. There was also a blatant patriarchal power play in ousting women leaders and scrapping democratic functioning, with some State leaders refusing to conduct elections and remaining lifetime presidents.





EXPANDING THE WIF PROGRAMME

In the second phase of the WIF programme, which took off in 1998, other countries like Brazil, Ghana and South Africa were brought into the loop. At that phase, a workshop in Latin America was conducted where, again, the analysis of the feminist perspective in fisheries was rejected by the leadership of Chile as being too Marxist. CONAPACH, the national federation of fishworker organizations in Chile, was a participant in the ICSF network right from the time of the Rome Conference. Being a very male-dominated organization, it was not surprising that there were no women from the community participating in the Latin America workshop. The main women participants came from Brazil, where Maria Cristina Maneschy and Rene Schärer had understood the importance of woman's spaces in fisheries and related them to the conservation of the environment as well. Both have followed the WIF programme in Brazil and have joined several of its initiatives. *(Cristina elaborates on this programme separately, later.)*

In Africa, the WIF initiative first started in Senegal in 1993 and extended to Ghana, with Davil Eli, and later to Guinea, with Mamayawa Sandou. In Senegal, the first step was for women to be integrated as members in the fishworkers' organization, CNPS. This was resisted, but the women were allowed to create their own committee that would be included in CNPS. This women's wing in CNPS had extremely vocal and able women leaders who began to intervene actively within the organization, giving voice to the issues of women in fisheries³. CNPS, and the outspoken women in it, attracted the attention of the government, which did not hesitate to develop an organization of its own and take advantage of the funds that became available for women in fisheries. As elsewhere, a divide-and-rule policy of access to funds divided able women leaders and took the punch

³ Details of the Senegal WIF programme in Dossier No. 3 Women in Fisheries, ICSF



out of women's agency. One must say here, to their credit, that the multilateral agencies were spending a lot of time, energy and money in furthering the fish processing techniques of women in fisheries in western Africa, thereby lightening their burden and helping them produce better quality products. Unfortunately, in Ghana, where most of this work was done, there was soon no fish for the women to process. CFFA, in which Beatrice Gorez was extremely active, was giving a voice to women in the fisheries agreement debates. But all the same, there was a negative impact of the fisheries agreements in terms of loss of fish to women in general. Meeting the needs of women in the fish market chain was crucial.

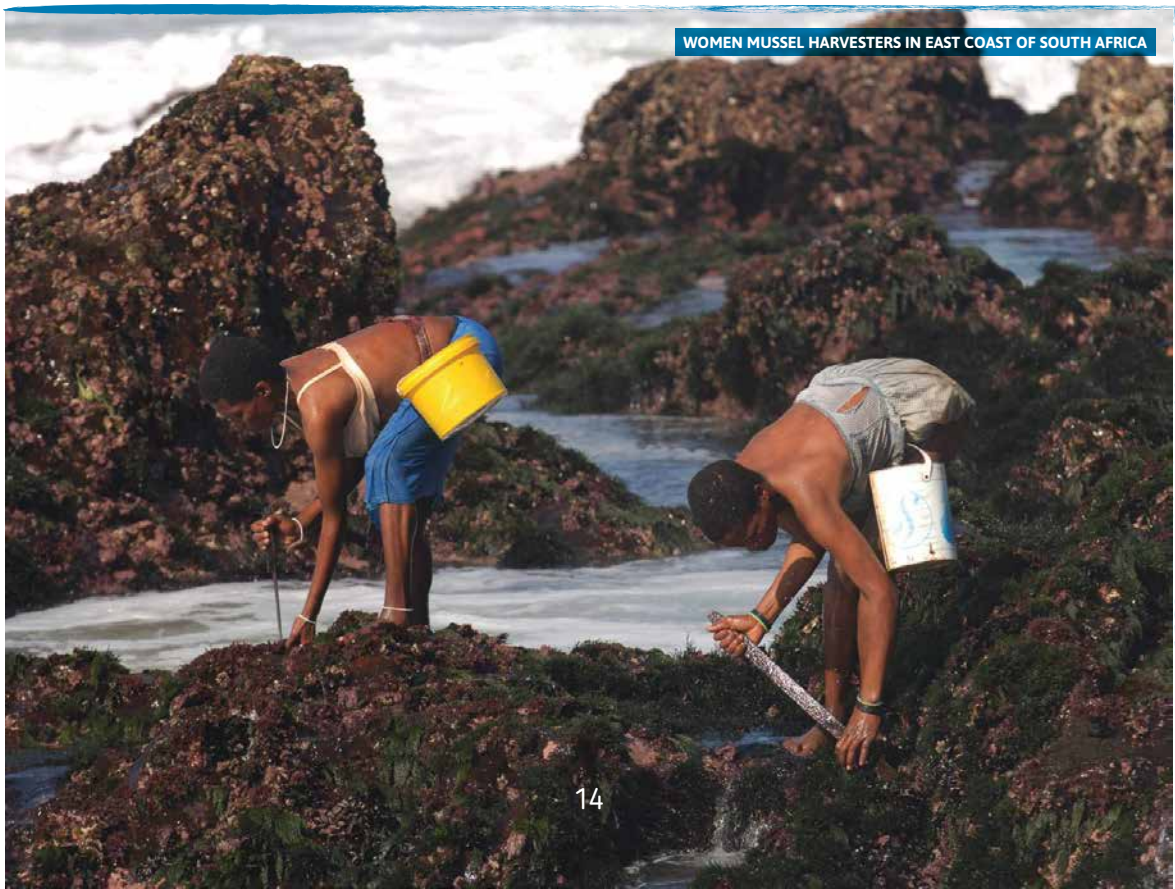


The workshops with women from the western African countries led to the exchanges of women processors and vendors, and highlighted the need for market linkages. This led to ICSF assisting the local groups to undertake studies on fish trade in west Africa. This process culminated in the fish fair of women traders, processors and vendors, held in Senegal in 2001. At the workshop of women that took place before the fair, the women decided on ways in which they would try to overcome the trade barriers, and network among themselves.



ICSF withdrew from that process as there were other west African bodies supported by the FAO and other donors that began to operate. The West African Association for the Development of Artisanal Fisheries (WADAF) was in place by then, and ICSF felt that we had done our job by providing inputs for the organization of the fishworkers, by indicating ways of alliance building, by networking with scientists and research institutes, and by facilitating a certain level of leadership development. Unfortunately, though, the process was not taken ahead.

It was only later that women in fisheries in south and east Africa also got involved in the ICSF network. Although members of ICSF did participate in discussions on a White Paper in Fisheries in post-apartheid South Africa and attempted to highlight how a decentralized fisheries management could restore fishing rights to communities and safeguard livelihoods, South Africa chose the individual quota regime in fisheries management. But the women in fisheries, with the support of NGOs like Masifundise and women like Jackie Sunde and her team, continue to keep burning the flame for livelihood rights for women in the fisheries. *(More details from Jackie can be found elsewhere in this document.)*





RIPPLES OF THE WIF PROGRAMME

While I do not claim that all that has happened in the realm of women in fisheries has been a part of the ICSF initiative, I think I am not unjustified in saying that the ICSF publications and the interactions in the network and the networking of the ICSF Members certainly contributed to the expansion of the work and interests in women in fisheries worldwide.

With the **Fourth Women's World Conference** in Beijing in 1995, the fisheries sector began to find a niche for itself in the international women's discourse. Until then, most of the discussion and studies in the food sector related to women in agriculture and industry but gradually the discussion on women in fisheries began to also see the light of day. Some major books on the role of women in fisheries were published in Canada; women from the Pacific began highlighting these issues as the region's fishing fleets and canneries started moving to the South, causing loss of work to women in the North and exploiting women's labour in the South. Simultaneously, some researchers from the North began working with women in the South, highlighting the problems in the fisheries.

The publications of ICSF were a source of information to researchers worldwide. Barbara Neis brought together a large number of women and leaders from fishing communities, and NGO activists and researchers at the Memorial University in Canada in 1998 to share experiences, studies and concerns. That meeting turned





out to be a larger platform for the launch of a global commitment to women in fisheries. The fact that the issue of women in fisheries began to be taken seriously at the academic level drew a number of young researchers into the sector and today studies on women in fisheries find a place in almost every women's conference. Meryl Williams, then with the World Fish Center, opened up a space for women in fisheries at the International and Asian Fisheries Forums in and around 2000.

As we gradually lost contact with Rosa dos Ventos in Spain, there was more activity among the women in fishing communities in France. With the problems in fisheries intensifying, the wives of fishworkers and fishermen also began to organize themselves into their own women's groups. Initially, the women took up leadership in the local Fishery Survival Committees. Later, they began to create women's organizations to lobby for the status of collaborative spouse, training opportunities, and so on.

Danielle le Sauze, the wife of a fisherman, and Annette Le Zause, a local trade union leader of fish processing workers, who became members of Pêche et Développement, supported by Alain le Sann and Rene Pierre Chever and encouraged by Brian O'Riordan of ICSF, began to participate in CFFA. Rene Pierre, who was the Secretary of the Comite Locale du Peche, was very keyed into the WIF debate within ICSF even as he was simultaneously very preoccupied with the problems that their fishery was facing. They mooted various ways to sustain the fishery while, at the same time, reducing its impact on the environment.

When Cornelia returned from the Philippines to live in the Netherlands, she got involved with the women in fisheries there and the VinVis network took shape. This network had a very active group of women intervening in national government and European Union (EU) policy discussions. Cornelia, in her own capacity, networked with other women-in-fisheries organizations and women like Katia Frangoudes to create a European women-in-fisheries network aimed at lobbying the EU for the recognition of women's role in fisheries (giving them a formal status) and access to decision-making levels. In France, the women managed to get recognition of the 'collaborative spouse' status, thereby giving them access to social security and representation. This was a huge leap forward.



All through the decade of the 2000s, it was through the community-based resource management programmes (CBCRM) initiated in the Philippines and taken up in various countries in Asia, that the role of women got placed high on the agenda. Although that development accompanied a process of political decentralization in the Philippines, that was not necessarily so in other countries. Multilateral organizations and various universities in the West got involved in research-cum-involvement programmes that encouraged Asian governments to integrate these approaches in their fisheries development agendas. These initiatives also trained researchers in the Southern countries. But, by this time, it was obvious that women were being instrumentalized. Their free labour was being used to conserve resources whereas they were not being assured a fair share of the returns. In an assessment on gender concerns in CBCRM made by Cornelie Quist and Leonore Polotan-De la Cruz⁴, they state:

Within many CBCRM projects, women are beginning to be recognized as stakeholders in the resource management process and attempts are made to integrate women's empowerment in the community empowerment process, with positive results. In many CBCRM projects, women are seen playing an active role as fish wardens or in replanting mangroves or in coastal clean-ups. Women are often at the forefront of CBCRM projects as it is generally seen as an extension of their nurturing and caring role in the household and community. However, a critical review would reveal women's low participation in co-management decision-making bodies and lack of recognition of their distinct interests. Women are often not assured of a share of the benefits of resource management measures, such as secured (joint) access rights to (shell)fish grounds or access to improved fish catch for consumption/sale or improved technology and fishery support services.

The authors went on to suggest the kinds of strategies that would be necessary to genuinely make CBCRM gender-just.

In the decade of the 2000s, several changes also took place in the leadership and composition of fishworkers' organizations. That opening of doors could have had to do both with the changing nature of the fisheries, the growing assertion of women within

⁴ Quist, Cornelie; Leonore Polotan-De la Cruz, Integrating a Gender Perspective In CBCRM Approaches, A review of experiences and best practices of Oxfam Novib partners in Southeast Asia and other efforts from world wide. 2008 By International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)



WOMAN WITH SEAWEED THAT IS LOCALLY CALLED COCHAYUYO, CHILE BY PATRICIO IGOR MELILLANCA

organizations and the fact that, in general, there was an unspoken compulsory requirement that women be placed in decision-making roles. Women began to be accepted as leaders in fishworker organizations.

When CONOPACH in Chile chose Zoila Soledad Bustamante, a seaweed gatherer from southern Chile, as its president, I was taken by surprise. At that time, CONAPACH was very active in the

ongoing debates on fisheries management and individual quotas. Zoila later told us that it had not been easy for her to take the place of the president as there was resistance and she was expected to be a mere rubber stamp. But when she realized that, she began to inform herself about the larger fisheries issues and her responsibilities as president, and gradually she began to assert herself and play the role she was elected for. Zoila has made a mark as a woman leader in her own right and also received a standing ovation for her presentation of the fishworkers' dream and 'manifesto' at the first-ever International Conference on Small-scale Fisheries, conducted by FAO in Bangkok in 2008.

By early 2000, even the Comité's Locale du Pêche in France began to have a few women presidents. NFF in India also began to give affiliation to organizations of fisherwomen in this decade. It is not as if we hope to see women as presidents of all fishworker organizations. We are not yet aware of what specific contributions women make as women at these levels of responsibility and power. On the contrary, we hope to see fishing communities and all fishworker organizations survive with both men and women playing their roles in sustaining their communities and enjoying the benefits equitably.





TO CONCLUDE

Why do we still speak about '**women in fisheries**' and not '**gender in fisheries**'? Within ICSF we began to highlight the role of women in the sector long before 'gender' began to be a fashionable term on the development bandwagon of nation States and multilateral agencies. Moreover, we had always spoken about the need to develop a feminist perspective in fisheries that challenged patriarchy and the way it operates in fisheries, in contrast to the gender discourse that looks merely at disaggregated data, gender roles, etc., and plays down the role of patriarchy in orienting the focus of the fishery and the role of fish as food.

The feminist perspective that we have tried to evolve has very much to do with the way we interpret the existing development paradigm, which is production- and market-oriented and assesses progress mainly by 'growth' in the gross domestic product (GDP). Such a paradigm, which is based on the logic of market forces, pays little heed to the wellbeing of the majority, while, at the same time, it plunders the natural resources with no regard to the environmental damage it inflicts both on nature and society. It is always the poor who pay for it with their lives and livelihoods, living always at the margins. Such structural violence is sustained by regimes of exclusion that disregard the democratic principles of transparency, accountability and participation, thereby justifying war and conflict, which further results in direct violence on women.

Hence, our feminist perspective in the WIF programme tried to raise these issues within fishworker organizations, making connections between their lived realities and the global and national developments that affect their fisheries. I am fully aware of the fact that fishers alone cannot fight the neoliberal development paradigm that engulfs us. We supporters also find ourselves trapped in institutional processes and lifestyles that



condone such development. Hence, there is a need for all of us to introspect since the road we have travelled has been paved with rich experiences but the task ahead remains much more complex than what we had imagined when we commenced our journey. While women in fisheries will remain the focus, the need to unite with women at the margins in all livelihood struggles in society, under the shared dream of one day living in a world where all life will be respected, should continue to shape our alliances and actions.

In the industrial world, which faces deep economic crisis due to its inability to recover to create jobs and provide social security to its populations, it is an opportune juncture to rethink and reshape development priorities and social spending in ways that sustain life more than markets. Towards that end, the experiences of the women's movement and feminist theory have valid contributions to make.

Personally, for me, this journey with women in fisheries has enriched my own life and perspective and sustained my hopes since, despite the difficulties, it has been worth it. The experiences at ICSF and the friendships with the wonderful men and women of the Collective have also enriched my contributions to the Indian women's movement at large. Not many women have the opportunity to delve deep into women's issues in a particular sector. Quite a substantial number of Indian women have also participated in this process, thereby widening the terrain for constructive change. Hence, the journey continues.





CORNELIE ADDS:

For me, this journey commenced in 1980 when I met Nalini. Those days, I was based in Sri Lanka, but used to regularly visit Kerala where I met Nalini and other women like Aleyamma and Mercy, who were doing inspiring, pioneering work with women of fishing communities to let them claim a space in fishing co-operatives and, later, in the fishworkers' union.

It was a **“struggle within a struggle”**, mobilizing poor marginalized women within the larger struggle of the marginalized fishing communities, led by men. This **“struggle within a struggle”** was also the biggest challenge for ICSF’ Women in Fisheries programme and for us women involved in that long journey. We felt that through the WIF programme we could strengthen the voice of women fishworkers and women of fishing communities, and support them to get their concerns placed on the agenda of the male fishworker organizations.

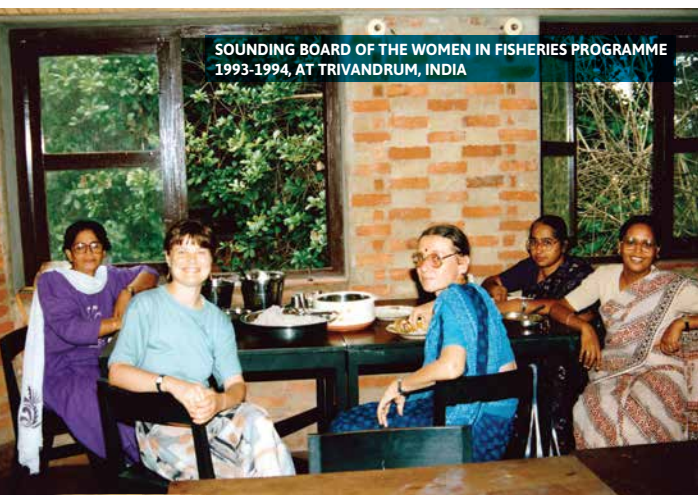
Nalini and I started off in the 1990s with a very ambitious programme. We travelled a lot to meet with women fishworkers, women of fishing communities, fishworkers' organizations and all kinds of other resource persons. We got enormous support from local ICSF Members. Nevertheless, it was quite tough in the beginning, in particular because of communication limitations, long travel periods, and funding constraints. (In those days there was no internet, telephone was expensive and letters took more than two weeks to reach anywhere). We were doing pioneering work, and we were confronted with a deeply rooted lack of awareness and understanding about women’s role in fisheries (which was also prevalent among women themselves). But meeting with all these people and, in particular, talking to the women of the communities and observing their daily reality and lives, had an enormous impact on us and helped us to develop a women-in-fisheries agenda and to crystallize a feminist perspective in fisheries.



Soon, within ICSF, more and more enthusiastic and committed women joined us on our journey, like Chantal, Cristina and, later, Naina, Jackie and Chandrika – and then even some of the men. At the ground level, the WIF programme contributed to the awareness of women of fishing communities and encouraged them to organize and speak out their views and concerns. I have often been very impressed by the excellent communication skills of women and their drive to promote social cohesion in the community.

Unfortunately, these skills are still not greatly appreciated by the leadership of the fishworker movement. I can never forget the brave attempts by women of the community to pacify the fighting male leaders during the Constituent Assembly of the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers in Loctudy, France, in 2000, which, despite such efforts, could not prevent a split of the international fishworker movement.

Even though the WIF programme contributed to the awareness of men of fishing communities about the values of women's contribution, it is still a long way to go for women in fisheries to achieve equal access to decisionmaking and benefits, in relation to men. This is certainly true for women who belong to the most marginalized in the sector.



On our WIF journey, we also linked up with inspiring women outside ICSF, mostly academics working in the field of fisheries, who shared our concerns. For me personally, the debates on a feminist and gender perspective of fisheries were most challenging. They contributed to my deeper understanding of globalization and fisheries, and the impact on fishworkers and fishing communities. In the mainstream world of fisheries, where the hegemony of the 'modern' Western development model prevails, what is

not considered as valuable in terms of economic growth and financial benefit has become 'invisible' or marginal or is seen as part of the 'private sphere', the domain of women. In my understanding, this is the most important cause of the decline of communities whose lives and livelihoods are dependent on fisheries and the aquatic ecology.



The ICSF WIF programme experience and the discourse on a feminist perspective in fisheries always had a very important meaning in my daily professional work as a fishery adviser. In this position, I am inspired to promote an integrated livelihood approach to fisheries, connecting water-based activities to land-based activities, and the validation of the invisible and often generally unpaid contribution of women to production and reproduction. I try very much to encourage a 'nurturing'

relation with fish resources and the people whose livelihoods are dependent on them. I feel enormously privileged that I could use my worldwide experiences to inspire others, in particular those who do not have such opportunities of exposure.



CORNELIE, PRESENTING CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AT THE CEBU INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP IN 1994, PHILIPPINES

The WIF experience also inspired me to support, in my own capacity, the creation of VinVis, the Dutch network of fishermen's wives, and encourage their participation in public fishery debates and fishery management councils. The women of VinVis came forward as spokespersons of their community, and raised issues that concern the quality of life and a long-term future perspective for their children and communities. For this, they won the respect of the community. I am very proud of these women, in particular, Marja and Anne Marie en Mariet, who showed true leadership capacities and lost their inhibition to challenge attitudes, ideas and policies that are unsustainable, non-transparent and patronizing.

VinVis also played a leading role in the formation of AKTEA, the European women-in-fisheries network, which is co-ordinated by Katia Frangoudes. AKTEA lobbies for formal recognition of women's role in fisheries, specifically, for a status of collaborative spouse. I see VinVis and AKTEA as nurseries for a new leadership of women. Until now, only a very few women – wives of fishermen – have succeeded in taking up leadership positions in the mainstream fishermen's organizations. The biggest barriers remain the double workload faced by women, and the cultural constraints to entry into this male domain.



The ICSF WIF programme enabled me to promote awareness among women in the global North about the problems and struggles of women in fisheries in the global South. I have been very happy that I could facilitate participation of women in fisheries from the South in the first AKTEA Conference in 2004 and the participation of AKTEA in the international symposium on **“Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities”**, organized by ICSF in 2010. It also has been wonderful to facilitate direct linkages between VinVis and their sister women-in-fisheries groups in India and, to some extent, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

Being part of ICSF, it was a political choice for us to get involved deeply in this *struggle within the struggle*. In Europe, this *struggle within the struggle* does not only apply to the struggle of fisherwomen within the mainstream fisheries organizations, but also within the women’s rights lobby and within the green NGOs. Most of the women’s rights activists today are young, educated women professionals who are very committed to the cause of gender equality worldwide. The VinVis women and I, as a fishery adviser, however, feel a bit like outsiders in this company where fisheries looks to be seen as a masculine world with no opportunity for gender equality. The green NGOs often have a good participation of women at all levels. These women, however, hardly show an interest in gender issues, and also do not see the link with the crisis of the current fishery development model. Here again the struggle has to deepen.

For me, the WIF journey has been a very inspiring experience, which has influenced my perspective and direction in work and life. Without my friends of ICSF, VinVis and AKTEA, I never could persevere in this *struggle within a struggle*. ICSF was created by pioneering and creative personalities who had no fear in challenging the paradigm that underlies mainstream fisheries development processes. The organization's solidarity linkages and warm friendships form a solid base for open debate and a nursery for new ideas and creative strategies. The WIF programme is, therefore, very much part of ICSF and, in my view, even its moral watchdog. I feel extremely fortunate to have been part of this collective from the beginning, because it gave me an opportunity to make meaning of my personal life.



MARIA CRISTINA MANESCHY AND NAÍNA PIERRI FROM BRAZIL ADD THE FOLLOWING NOTE ON THE HISTORY OF THE ARTISANAL FISHERMEN'S UNIONS:

In order to better understand the repercussions of WIF activities, it is necessary to make reference to the social contexts where they took place, in particular, to consider the status of the artisanal fishermen's unions, the so-called *colonias*, which were undergoing noteworthy changes following the promulgation of the Brazilian Constitution in 1988, after the fall of the military regime and the impacts of the pro-democracy social movements. Some important partners of WIF activities in Brazil, especially in the initial period, were fishermen who were engaged in the promotion of these changes via the building of an alternative professional organization, both at the national level and at the federal States' level: the **MONAPE (National Movement of the Artisanal Fishermen)**. Another partner was **CPP (Fishermen's Pastoral Council)**, an organization linked to that section of the Catholic Church which at that time was professing 'liberation theology'. CPP was also engaged in contributing to promoting effective fishermen's community organizations.

Until the end of the 1980s, it was only rarely that women used to be affiliates in fishermen colonies⁵. This fact was true both in the case of these organizations and the separate social welfare schemes that applied to rural workers in Brazil, among them the men and women in fisheries. It was the new constitution that first consecrated the principle of universal social welfare rights, even if, in practice, this principle is far from being universally applied.

Before 1988, the social welfare provisions for rural peoples, peasants and fishers were allocated lower outlays compared to those granted to urban workers. And, more importantly, married women were not covered individually if the husband, the 'head' of

⁵ The word "colony" (in Portuguese "colônia") is the official name attributed to the artisanal fishermen unions at the municipal level in Brazil.



the family unit, was already protected. In this sense, the rural women were only half-citizens. So, commonly, they would not enroll in the unions, thus denying themselves access to the official agencies that provided retirement and pension benefits. The unions had the official mandate to determine the professional status of the rural workers, a necessary prerequisite for recognition in the social welfare system. Besides maintaining these collaborative links – and consequent allegiance - to the State, these organizations were created and operated as male spaces; the women would go there to deal with their husbands' interests, for example, to arrange for specific documents and to look for medical assistance for them and their children.

Moreover, rural workers and fishermen's organizations had received public support through agreements to offer a few, but much-needed, medical services in areas poorly served by such facilities. This intricate relationship between governments and professional organizations has long marked the history of rural unions in Brazil. Although traditions keep influencing mores, the picture has changed considerably. The 1988 Constitution recognized the right to freedom of association for all; access to social rights no more depended on membership in an association, and governmental interventions were no longer admitted in the colonies. Besides, it is well known that in different regions, renewed rural workers' unions have courageously fought land concentration, deforestation and violence, even during the authoritarian years. In the Amazon hinterland, peasant leaders face death threats even today.

If rural unions and fishermen colonies have common historical backgrounds, there are some contrasts that need to be noted, to help us perceive the specific barriers against women finding their place within the fishermen colonies. The rural workers' unions were since the late 1950s, and many had their origins in local struggles for rights to land and for the regulation of labour relations. The first fishermen colonies are older and date to the second decade of the 20th century, emanating from a government intervention. The specific initiative came from the Navy and had two aims: first, to prepare a reserve of labour force for its fleet, as the obligatory work on board invited greater opposition after the end of the slavery in 1888; and second, to increase the surveillance of the coast in the post-war atmosphere. The foundation of colonies in isolated localities along the extensive littoral area, endowed with some social infrastructure such as schools, was meant to

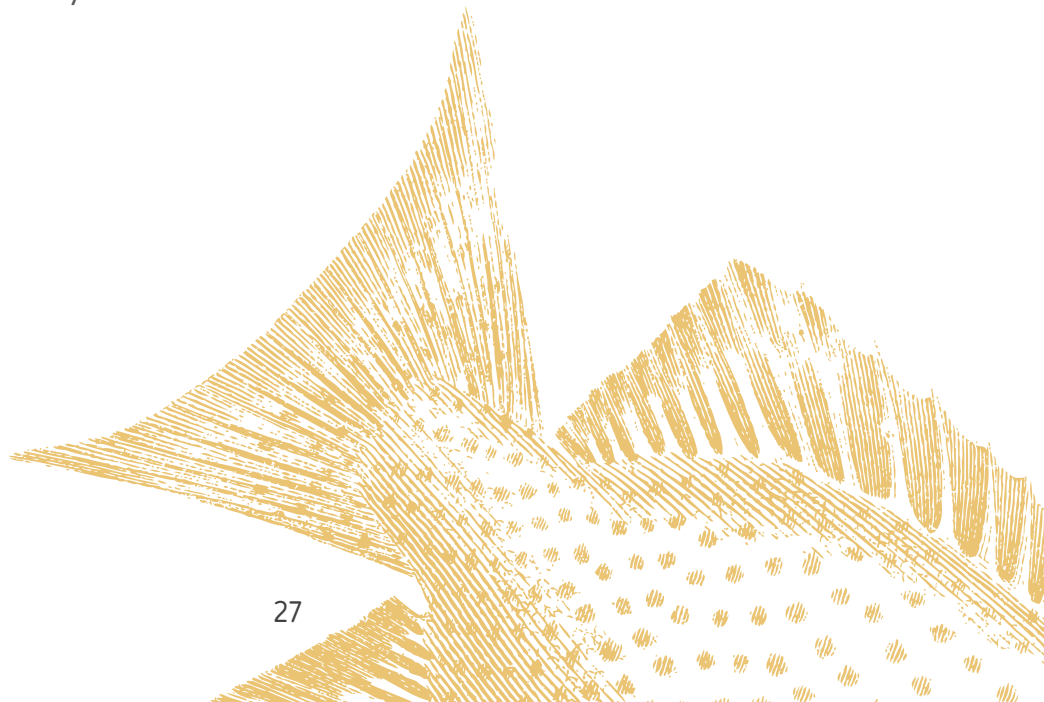


'integrate' them into the nation. Clearly, the fishermen colonies were not meant to function as organizations that supported the fishing sector autonomously vis-à-vis the State or the local elites.

One heritage of this history is that the colonies were not headed by bona fide fishermen, but by middlemen, merchants and local politicians — in short, non-fishermen who maintained vertical relationships with the members of the organization. These features became the trademarks of the colonies, where the leaders used to remain in office for several years, in some cases even decades; elections were reduced to formal procedures governed by official by-laws and sanctioned by official agencies.

This was the general framework that MONAPE and CPP were struggling to change when WIF activities started in Brazil. They were particularly committed to support local movements intended to replace the ancient leaders by bona fide fishermen or fisherwomen. In this context, the women participating in the movement had strategic value; it also led to greater social sensibility to women's roles in different economic spaces, thanks to the influence of feminist and other social movements in rural areas, especially among peasants, where some women were becoming renowned leaders.

Nowadays, it is not rare to find women at the head of fishermen colonies. This does not imply that they will automatically support the social standing of fisherwomen at large. But it is a considerable possibility in the circumstances.





ICSF'S CONTACTS AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING

MONAPE, the organization that opposed the official colonies and their representative organizations at the level of the States — the Fishermen Federations – joined ICSF activities on different occasions, notably in the initial years. Its delegates took part in several meetings organized within the WIF schedule. From the 1990s until the mid-2000s, MONAPE used to be very active. Some years ago, as stated earlier, the artisanal fishermen had started to organize more or less autonomously of the State. In this process MONAPE had the support of CPP. It was successful in getting hold of some State Federations and local colonies. It also achieved a solid reputation and ties with other social movements and the academy, advocating issues of fishermen's and communities' rights to environmental concerns. This was very important, given the fact that until then, fisheries development in Brazil was biased towards the industrial sector in capture and processing operations.

MONAPE joined the WIF programme after two leaders took part at the ICSF Cebu meeting. They became more sensitized about women-in-fisheries issues, which, they acknowledged, they had not known much about earlier. To quote one of the first MONAPE co-ordinators, Aladim Alfaya: **“It was as if we were building a house, but some bricks were missing”**. As a result of their participation at the Cebu meet, they organized the First National Meeting of Fisherwomen, in 1994, in the city of São Luis, Maranhão State.

At the States' level, MONAPE activists and followers gradually began to ask women to register as fisherwomen, with two aims: **(a)** to recognize and support their own professional status, and **(b)** to strengthen the fishermen's organization and, notably, MONAPE's intervention in the different regions, where groups were separately struggling to participate in the colonies' elections. Displacing long-established 'presidents', who had



been able to nurture bonds with affiliates through a mixture of submission, conformity, loyalty and gratitude, was not an easy task. It became one of MONAPE's goals to bring women into the movement, supporting their self-recognition and attract them to the colonies. MONAPE thus took up the 'cause' of the women.

CPP had long ago started to contribute to the visibility of fisherwomen, first in the northeastern Brazilian States, where women collect shellfish to sell (the *marisqueiras*). Back in the 1970s, some of the missionaries started working with the *marisqueiras* living in suburban areas in coastal cities, transmitting information on several matters, such as community organization, citizenship and social rights. This pioneer undertaking led to the recognition of the *marisqueiras* as fisherwomen and allowed them access to the pertinent professional papers. It also led to the election of the first woman to be president of a colony in Brazil, in 1985 in Pernambuco State. Nine years later, also unprecedentedly, a woman was elected president of a Fishermen Federation, again in Pernambuco State.

In Pará State, besides MONAPE, the other partners that joined the work team were GEPEM, a feminist research group from the Federal University of Pará, and the regional CPP office. In the initial phases, Maria Cristina Maneschy, Maria Luzia Miranda Álvares and Christine





Escallier, with students and other collaborators in GEPEM, were more active, along with Ana Laíde Barbosa from CPP. Marineide Almeida and Josenete Lima did a good deal of fieldwork in the first years, in fishing communities in Pará.

In Ceará State, from the inception of ICSF activities in Brazil, the NGO Terramar assumed the gender approach and organized workshops and participative studies about women's roles and gender perspectives regarding mainstream development within the coastal communities. Many of Terramar members have co-operated with ICSF's activities. Among them, Cristiane Faustino has been more often engaged with the activities related to WIF. René Scharer, ICSF Member, supported WIF activities and provided special inputs to the organization of the meetings that took place in Ceará.

In the south of the country, NUPAUB, from University of São Paulo — with Antônio Carlos Diegues at the head — was always supportive. More recently, in Paraná State, Naína Pierri, researcher from the Marine Studies Centre, Federal University of Paraná, came to join the programme. She and her team had contributed to the knowledge and awareness raising about women's status in fisheries by means of extension and research activities in coastal communities, as well as by promoting local women's leadership and their inclusion in the **National Fisherwomen's Organization (Articulação Nacional das Pescadoras , ANP)**.

So, when the WIF programme started in Brazil, some seeds had already been sown. ICSF contributed to conjugate the efforts related to women in fisheries, connected them to initiatives in other countries and provided theoretical inputs. Parts of ICSF resources were employed to facilitate exchanges of women from different local communities. In 2009 and 2010, ICSF supported meetings in the cities of Fortaleza (Ceará) and Belém (Pará), which helped to enhance the ongoing

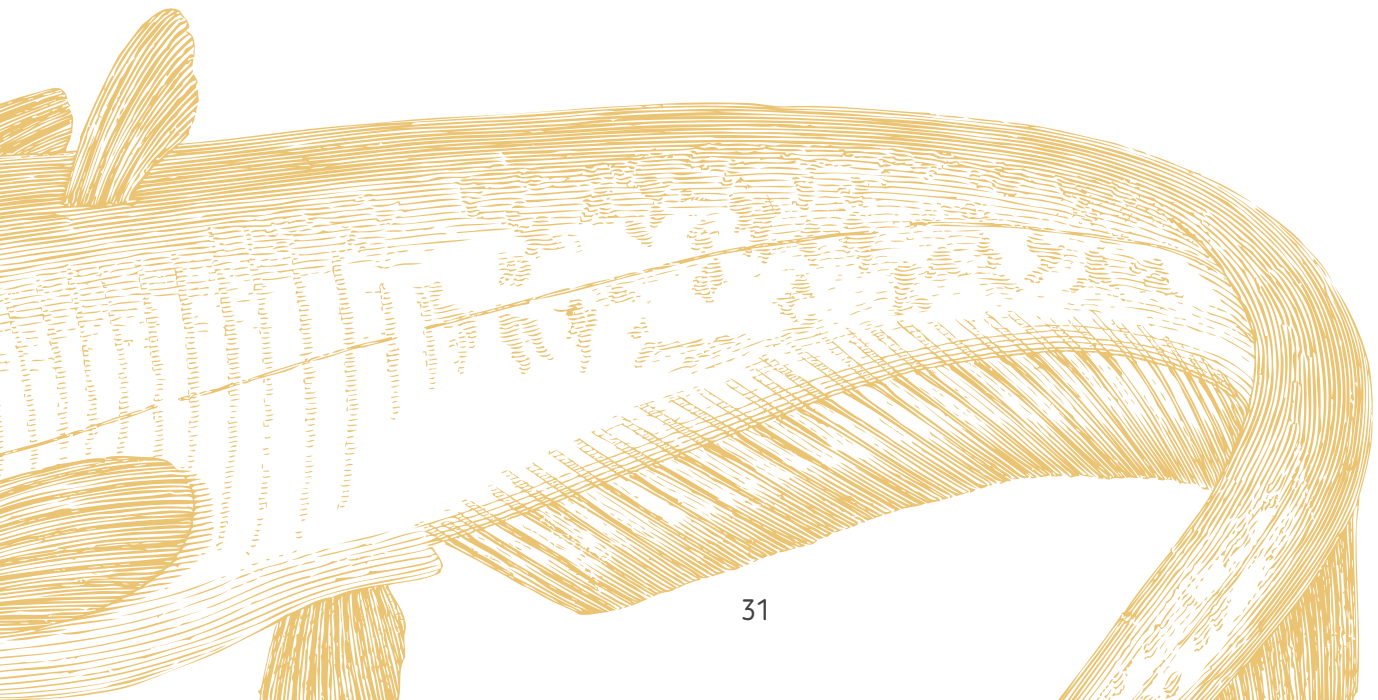




ANP, a process where the support and leadership of CPP members is greatly acknowledged.

Of course, the building of the organization differs from region to region, with different impetus in different periods. It is not totally true to talk about one 'Brazilian' movement. ANP has members or sympathizers especially in five States: Pernambuco, Bahia, Pará, Ceará and Paraná. Within the States, some communities are more committed and linked than others, such as those from where the leaders come and those where the local partners are more active and connected.

In addition, if the movement is more developed in coastal areas, some continental communities have good links to CPP and to ANP, as in Pará and along the São Francisco River, in the northeastern States. It is worth noting that local groups in many regions are creating 'fisherwomen' or 'women in fishing' associations, not necessarily connected to ANP and to WIF activities. Often, they emerge in response to opportunities of credit or technical assistance to associations, to apply for public support, or in order to take part in social councils that require membership in an association.





FISHERWOMEN START WALKING ON THEIR OWN FEET

When the national government, elected in 2002, decided to re-institute a federal agency devoted to the fisheries sector – not yet as a full-fledged Ministry, but as a National Fisheries and Aquaculture Office – it called for the 1st National Conference on Aquaculture and Fisheries, in 2003. By this time, the category was no longer predominantly male, and women delegates came from different States. Yet, these delegates had the chance to organize themselves during the meeting and they complained about the small number of women present. Their grievances led to the government calling the 1st National Meeting of the Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture, in 2004, preceded by preparatory local meetings.

During the 2nd National Conference on Aquaculture and Fisheries, held in 2006, the women delegates succeeded in including the statement of the 2004 women's meeting as part of the statement of the 2nd Conference, an unexpected outcome. That was when they decided to form the ANP. Náina Pierri and her team were active supporters of this event.



The ANP has organized two meetings: the first, in 2006, soon after the Conference, and the second, in May 2010, in the city of Fortim, Ceará. The latter was partially funded by the WIF programme, as that meeting was also an opportunity to prepare the Brazilian fisherwomen to participate in the ICSF “Recasting the Net” workshop. The participants from Pará State could organize a preparatory meeting in Belém, in February 2010, with the support of CPP, GEPEM and the WIF programme; the delegates to the May meeting in Fortaleza were then appointed.



At their second meeting, according to the report Pierri and Azevedo sent to ICSF, the fisherwomen called for appropriate health policies that take into account their labour conditions, including repetitive effort injuries, back pain, sun- and humidity-related skin ailments, gynaecological problems, and vulnerability to attack by poisonous animals. They also argued that since, like the fishermen, they generally start working during childhood, equitable social welfare provisions should be adapted to their experiences too.

The institution of an unemployment insurance benefit scheme during fishing bans in some regions of the country has particularly stimulated women's professional registration. It is worth noting that by the time the unemployment insurance was created, many women who were working in inshore activities other than capture fishing (notably, processing, net weaving and mending, baiting hooks and selling fish) would not be legally acknowledged as fisherwomen, and, for this reason, could not obtain professional status. The prevailing legal definition of fishing covered direct capture and did not include the other stages in the production chain. It was thus necessary to 'lie' in order to be recognized and to be able to apply for the insurance benefit.

In 2009, the new Fishing Law included these activities in the realm of fishing. The promulgation of the law partly reflected the growing visibility of women who engage in tasks such as fish processing and net weaving.

The new Fishing Law defines fisheries more broadly, recognizing women as economic agents, by including their inshore activities, both pre- and post-capture, which are numerous.

As a result of these initiatives and social movements, the category of 'fisherwomen' emerged in Brazil. Government meetings related to the sector often began to include sessions devoted to them. They now have seats in fishing councils. They have increased registration as workers in order to be eligible for social welfare benefits, thus transforming their traditional self-identity as housewives.

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WOMEN IN FISHERIES WORKSHOP IN BRAZIL, 2000

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Women became active in struggles relating to the protection of the coastal communities' territories; in the new 'reserves' in coastal zones, women are members of local councils. In addition, MONAPE's governing bodies count some women among their members. Some of these local and national leaders were participants at some of the WIF meetings. They



brought to the agenda broader concerns regarding the future of communities, welfare, security and livelihoods.

In the State of Bahia, where the shellfish gatherers (*marisqueiras*) have built alliances with NGOs and university researchers, important studies on occupational health have started. The *marisqueiras* have highlight the need to undertake such studies in other areas where women fishworkers also face harsh working conditions, such as the crab processors in the north of Brazil. A common complaint is that misunderstanding of their specific working conditions hinders the identification and classification of their ailments as job-related illnesses, which disadvantages them when applying for sickness leave (and related financial benefits). In this context, the linkage to ICSF's Documentation Centre, particularly access to material related to FAO and ILO processes, is most welcome.





GROWING VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN FISHERIES

In the Brazilian context, it is clear that there is a growing recognition of women as social actors in the fisheries field and in sustaining communities' livelihood, which strengthens their claims for social and territorial rights. As proof of this, professional fishermen's organizations in the country have increased the number of their women affiliates, while in the past, women – even those who fished regularly – could not enroll if their husbands were already enrolled. And, since 2006, groups of women in different States have been engaged to build on the ANP. Some of the leaders have had the opportunity of taking part in ICSF-supported meetings.

It is also worth noting that women have been active players in the processes that led to the institution of the new coastal protected areas called '**extractive reserves**' (**RESEXs**), which were instituted during the 2000s. Unlike the no-take zones, such reserves acknowledge the traditional fishing communities' rights to the resources. Today, the reserves' management councils often include some women members. Nonetheless, going by some of the speeches made at the meetings and studies on the topic in different regions in Brazil, they do not seem to have their concerns plainly addressed in fishing management decisionmaking. The challenge for the women is to define their roles as resource users and resource-dependent people, having a legitimate say on how to regulate these resources.

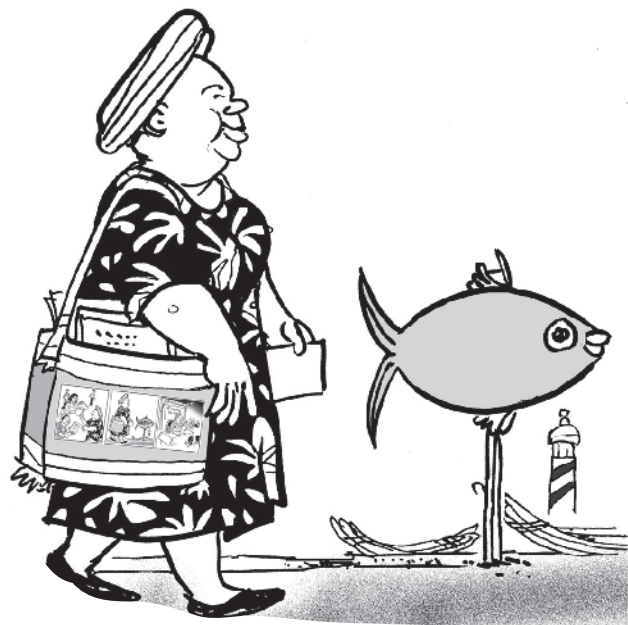
The difficulties women in fishing communities face to get recognition are partly due to the still prevalent view of women's economic roles in fisheries as secondary in relation to men's. Their fishing-related activities, inshore and offshore, are generally flexible and discontinuous, and mixed with family and community care. In the context of the dominant strictly economic and market perspective, their customary tasks are ranked behind



productive functions, in accordance with the conventional gender divide. Nonetheless, the growing visibility of fisherwomen and the emergence of women's leadership in the fisheries is a fact. That achievement is predicated on social acceptance and self-recognition of their status and legitimacy as resource users.

ICSF has played an important role in these political and cultural movements, through supporting studies, information dissemination, meetings and exchanges. ICSF has contributed notably to connecting communities, NGOs, researchers, State agencies, feminist groups and professional organizations. Strategic contacts and information exchanges were made possible or facilitated due to ICSF's initiatives in the region.

WIF activities started in Brazil by the mid-1990s with a different impetus. Initially, the activities were concentrated in Pará and Ceará States, located, respectively, in the northern and northeastern regions of the country. Local studies that aimed to identify women's spaces and roles in the fisheries and the coastal communities were conducted. Raising their visibility and contributing to their organization within the fishermen's professional organizations motivated the initial studies. The results were propagated in the form of popular media like booklets and videos, and presented at meetings on different occasions in community centres and fishermen colonies, in the municipalities where WIF activities had taken place.





NEW TIMES, ONGOING CHALLENGES

Notwithstanding all the progress made so far, Nalini Nayak's argument, cited above, is relevant for Brazil: **“Despite women's visibility in fisheries having increased, their spaces in the fishery and their ability to influence decisions have not increased substantially”**.

However, it is necessary to remember that this shortcoming also applies to artisanal fishermen, who claim that their concerns are not sufficiently considered and protected by fisheries policies. Governmental privilege has been accorded to extensive aquaculture and shrimp aquaculture plants in northeastern States, at the expense of coastal communities – not rarely accompanied by death threats to those who lead the movements against aquaculture expansion. The losses due to tourism and industrial expansion in their territories are not sufficiently addressed by governments. The reserves lack the social infrastructure (health, education, transport, income-generating alternatives) needed to ensure women's resilience.

Women face specific obstacles, ranging from opposition at home and within communities to their new public roles, to the pressures of taking care of the family. And within the professional spaces, they have to struggle to gain equal respect and to believe in themselves. The women who occupy seats in fishing councils often complain that they cannot influence the agenda, and feel ill at ease and hampered by lack of information to discuss issues like fishing quotas. However, they realize the importance of remaining part of these institutional processes. They understand that their presence in such councils is, first and foremost, to represent the interests of artisanal fishers. One main challenge is to develop their self-identification as important political actors who can help broaden the 'professional' perspectives.



The ANP works for social recognition and respect for women in the fisheries. They lack the autonomous financial means needed to operate improved communication flows between the co-ordination centre and the local groups. These constraints greatly reduce their visibility, strength and capability.

Some of the ongoing challenges to the women fishworkers in Brazil were spelled out during a recent event to which ICSF contributed, namely, **“The 3rd Seminar on Artisanal Fisheries and Social-environmental Sustainability: Protected Areas and Climate Change”**. It was held together with the IV Pernambuco Symposium on Women and Gender Relations: The Role of Women in Artisanal Fisheries. The meeting took place in Recife, from 31 August to 3 September 2010. The main organizers were the Joaquim Nabuco Foundation and ICSF; several other institutions collaborated, including **CPP, NUPAUB, Terramar** and the **North and Northeast Feminist Network for Research on Women and Gender Relations (REDOR)**. The meetings brought together fishermen and fisherwomen, researchers, teachers, students, public managers and institutions that support the artisanal fisheries sector, totalling 281 participants.

THE FINAL STATEMENT ADOPTED AT RECIFE CONTAINED, AMONG OTHERS, THE FOLLOWING DEMANDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Studies must be conducted on the need to apply fishing bans to the species women most frequently capture, and how management measures can be developed for their fisheries.**
- **Official support must be given to autonomous women's organizations, so as to promote their political participation and their ability to influence decisionmaking related to their livelihoods and their communities' welfare.**
- **Gender-disaggregated statistical data must be collected to help account for, and assess, the fishing production of the women.**
- **Credit lines must be adapted to the fisherwomen's needs.**
- **Institutions operating within the artisanal fisheries should recognize the importance of the women's work in fisheries and their roles in the defence of the territories of the traditional communities; they should include the gender aspect in their respective programmes.**



THE NEWBORN MOVEMENT OF FISHERMEN AND FISHERWOMEN IN BRAZIL

In recent years, the autonomous fishermen's organization has undergone a reformulation, aiming to revitalize grassroots participation and mobilization. In 2009, after a fishermen's demonstration in Brasília, followed by an autonomous conference on fisheries development, a new 'movement' was born, outside the ranks of MONAPE. It is noticeable that this new organization includes, for the first time, both women and men in its name: the National Movement of Fishermen and Fisherwomen in Brazil. It was formally instituted in April 2010 in the city of Acupe, Bahia State. To some extent, it is a shift within MONAPE, representing a new organization that intends to inherit and continue the best practices built during the history of the fishermen's struggles.

It is relevant to underline here that the women leaders of ANP were major players in setting up this new institution. Their influence was clear in the choice of a name for the organization that would affirm the principle of gender balance. Accordingly, each State membership must be represented by a man and a woman; women's claims must be clearly addressed in the movement's goals.

Thus, the participation of women has now gone beyond mere acceptance in the fishermen's unions or mere recognition by MONAPE. The ANP has become more than an independent organization for fisherwomen. These steps remain necessary in order to promote the fisherwomen's empowerment and to question mainstream fisheries development.

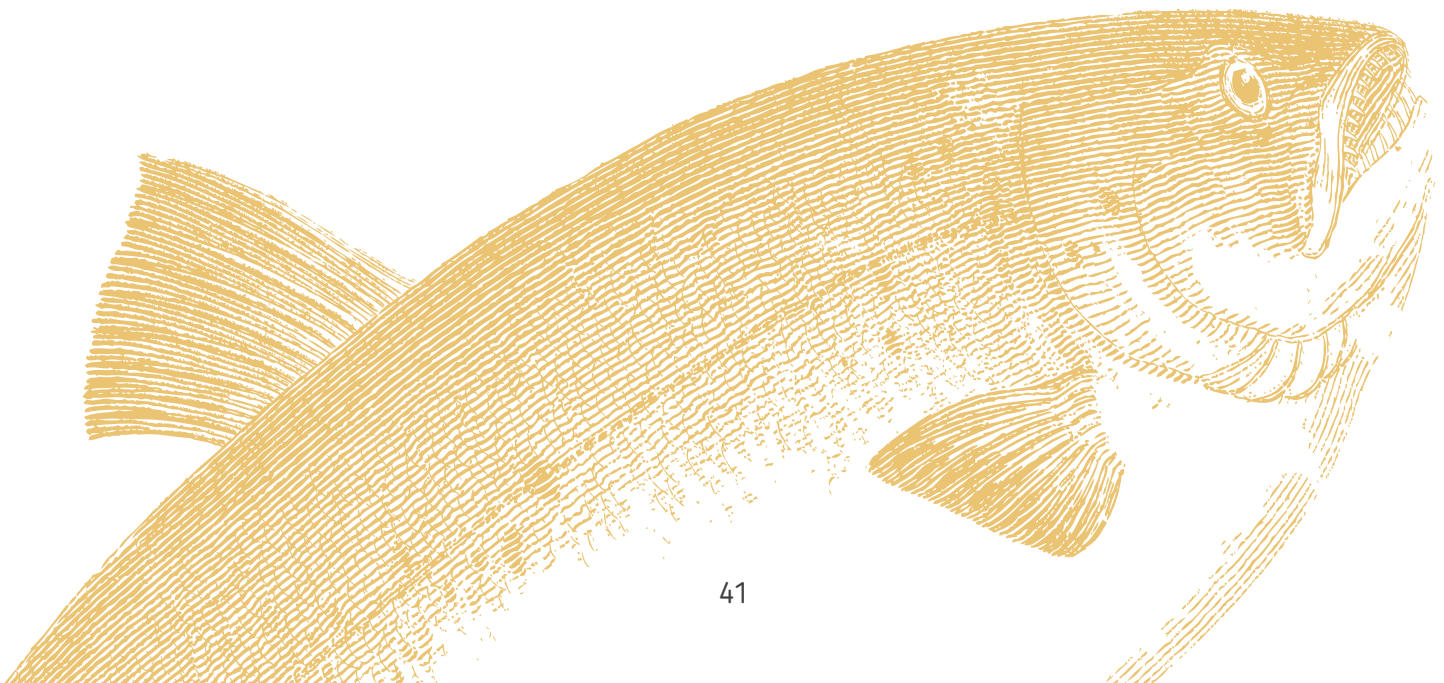
The new organization intends to work at the national level according to the principle of gender equity. Both fishermen and women would benefit from this shift. Nonetheless, it also implies new challenges, internal and external. Internally, the achievement of gender



equity calls for a lot of energy, for each day it is necessary to break entrenched values and prejudices. Outside the organization, there is need to sustain the women's movement at a pace that can match the more conventional sectorial interests. Historically, the women's claims have been viewed as secondary in the productive and economic sectors sides of fisheries.

ICSF's WIF programme has been able to help build the new organization. The organization's knowhow and efforts in international forums like FAO, especially during 2008 and 2010 in Latin America, have succeeded in including gender perspectives in the approach to the sector. ICSF has also made it possible for local leaders to participate in such events, through networking opportunities that have strengthened the links between local and international movements.

When ICSF began publishing its unique gender-in-fisheries newsletter, *Yemaya*, scope opened up for a wider group of women non-academics to share their experiences, which led to the enrichment of the literature in general on women in fisheries.





MARIA CRISTINA WRITES:

Our personal experiences within the WIF programme

For me, it took some time to 'discover' the women in the fisheries. For a long time, I had been interested in studying women's economic roles in general, and my first research, towards my graduate degree, was on women domestic workers. For my post-graduate studies, I wanted to consider the effects of the opening of the Amazonian frontier to national and international economics, especially from the 1970s, from the point of view of its traditional inhabitants. That is how I approached the coastal communities. Firstly, I focused on the fishermen's working relations and organizations; I looked at their particular practices of access to marine resources, in this particular environment, and how they endured competition with the growing industrial fleet. I then observed that the invisibility of the women in this field had social and historical roots.

Influenced by feminist studies about women's working experiences, I wanted to explore the links between fishing organization patterns and what women usually did as housewives, net weavers, crabs collectors, fish processors, and so on, sharing part of the investment risks of the sector. At that time, they did not identify themselves as workers, nor as 'land partners' of the crews - the title of a video we would produce some years later – and neither as nodes of the fisheries' social networks.

After having written an article on this topic in 1992, titled **“The Woman in the Fisheries: A Discrete Presence”** – the title indicates that I then still shared the conventional view that women were secondary economic agents — I could get in touch with artisanal fishermen's social movements that were starting to recognize and organize the fisherwomen in Pará State. And I took part at meetings they held.

As a result of this collaboration, I received an invitation from Antônio Carlos Diegues, in 1994, to join ICSF's WIF programme. For the first studies that my colleagues and I did as



part of WIF activities, we could associate data collection and the organization of meetings with the women from different communities. The aim was to discuss not only research data, but also to share information on organization, social rights and gender relations, aided by different local partners, among whom were feminist groups working with peasant women. We were then able to witness the first groups of women who create the first associations in coastal communities in Pará State. To some extent, we supported the linkages between these groups and similar movements in the neighboring States of Maranhão, Ceará and Pernambuco, where ICSF had built good ties.

NAÍNA PIERRI WRITES:

Our personal experiences within the WIF programme

Personally, it was my desire to support the rights of the poor and women, and the dream of a better world that brought me to the cause of women in fisheries some years ago. As a researcher, I have aimed to collaborate to produce knowledge from a feminist perspective; and, as an activist, to contribute to women's collective organization. I started collaborating with the co-author of this text, Maria Cristina Maneschy, who sent me her writings about women in fisheries in Brazil and who introduced me to ICSF's publications. I began to have access to ICSF's critical views and political engagements.

In 2010, I was honoured to be invited to join ICSF's team and to collaborate with the WIF programme. In this short period, I had the opportunity to know different realities, institutions and people, which increased my understanding of small-scale fisheries and the role of women in them, which enriched me personally. I could also develop different action programmes in support of women in fisheries at international meetings. From this point of view, being an ICSF Member is a great privilege. It broadens my engagement to learn more and to better serve our struggles.



For both of us, and certainly for others, joining ICSF's WIF programme became more and more a path of meaningful achievement to further the feminist perspective on fisheries development. We were able to develop a comprehensive view on the connections between coastal fishing communities' livelihoods and rights, which depend on women and men in different arenas, and broader concerns on environmental sustainability, social justice and equity. In this sense, one of the WIF programme's achievement is the consciousness that has been raised beyond just a section of ICSF. It helped to build a strong framework for the analysis of fisheries development worldwide. Particularly, it analyzed how mainstream processes rely on patriarchal values that have long sustained modernization efforts and, more recently, have authorized restructuring processes in response to environmental limits, irrespective of communities' rights to resources. While we acknowledge the very special leadership of Nalini Nayak and Cornelie Quist, the WIF programme's pioneers, we feel that the programme's trajectory has also been a joint learning experience for many, including non-members.

WOMEN SORTING AND CUTTING FISH AT A BEACH LANDING CENTRE, BRAZIL





WHOSE VOICES, WHOSE RIGHTS, WHAT RIGHTS? JACKIE SUNDE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

In 2009, Nothando was arrested for harvesting inter-tidal resources in the area adjacent to her community in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, a section of rural coastline along which women have been harvesting mussels and other resources for centuries. She was handcuffed and beaten by the conservation officers who arrested her, and subsequently forced to strip to her underclothes and dragged 'like a dog' to the main gate of the marine reserve (pers. comm. TRALSO 2011).

Nothando and hundreds of other rural women living along this coast continue to face repeated arrests and harassment for harvesting resources on which they depend for protein and basic food security. In 1994, South African women like Nothando voted in the first democratic elections in the country, voting for a free South Africa based on the principles of non-discrimination espoused by the liberation movement over the preceding decades. Gender equity and the promotion of a non-sexist society was central to the vision of reconstruction and development that was articulated by the **African National Congress (ANC)** in its election campaign.

A key focus of the ANC campaign was the need to transform the racially based, capitalist economy that had given rise to gross inequities in access to natural resources in South Africa. Within the fisheries industry, this had enabled a century of white-dominated industrial fisheries, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few companies, while the majority of black South Africans living in coastal towns were denied legal access to marine resources in their own right, unless they were working for a white-owned company. In parts of the country designated as black residential areas, known as 'Bantustans', coastal communities were permitted to access marine resources for subsistence purposes only and under strict regulation and permit controls. In many of these areas, conservation initiatives, such as those adjacent to Nothando's community,



WOMEN AND CHILDREN, HARVESTING SHELL
FISH IN EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA

dispossessed the local traditional fishing communities of their customary access to, and use of, marine resources, without any consultation or compensation.

Seventeen years after the introduction of democracy in South Africa, women living in fishing communities up and down the coast remain extremely marginalized. The majority of them still have no legally recognized rights to marine resources, and there is very little support amongs fishermen for the

principle of gender equity in the current small-scale fisheries policy drafting process. Women's voices within the sector are not heard as being distinctive of a constituency with specific needs and interests.

In addition to this sector-specific marginalization, women in South Africa, in general, still face higher risks of rape and violence than women in most other countries; rural women in the country also have one of the world's highest rates of HIV/AIDs. Extremely high rates of poverty and unemployment pertain in many of the rural coastal communities, particularly in those on the eastern seaboard, exacerbating the oppression that women experience.

How has this discrimination in the fisheries sector been able to continue in a context in which small-scale fishing communities were successful in obtaining an Equality Court Order in 2007 that ordered the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to develop a new fisheries policy that 'accommodated the socioeconomic rights' of these traditional fishing communities? How is it possible that 25 years after ICSF began advocating internationally for the rights of small-scale fishers, including those of women in fisheries, women in small-scale fisheries in South Africa appear to be more marginalized than ever?



As a Member of ICSF, and also, at the time, as the Research and Advocacy Officer at Masifundise Development Trust, I have been reflecting on our work with women and wondering where we went wrong.

In the years following the elections and the development of South Africa's new Constitution, a series of legal reforms was introduced, aimed at institutionalizing the transformation of the economy and the governance of natural resources. In 1998, the Marine Living Resources Act was introduced with the objective of transforming the historical injustices in the fishing industry and securing ecological sustainability, while ensuring economic stability. At the time, a small group of small-scale fishers participated in the policy deliberations; however, most of them withdrew in protest at the way in which the new framework was geared towards the large industrial sector. Workers within the sector aligned themselves with management on the issue of redistribution, with the effect that the new regime that was ushered in aimed to facilitate racial change within the existing power relations within the industry; consequently, the rights of coastal traditional, small-scale fishing communities to restitution of their customary access and use of resources were ignored.

ICSF SUPPORT FOR SMALL-SCALE FISHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL LINKS

It was at this time that ICSF first began building links with the nascent small-scale fishers' movement in South Africa. Representatives of ICSF visited South Africa and engaged in some discussions with fisher leaders, encouraging them to fight for more space for the small-scale sector and to ensure that their voices were heard in policy processes. At the time, the small-scale fishers in South Africa were not well organized. A small group of fishers in the Western Cape was organized through the work of one charismatic leader, Andy Johnston, who had set up the Artisanal Fishers' Association of South Africa. The group was dominated by fishermen, although the women partners of a few of these fishermen were also part of the group.

This was prior to my work at Masifundise and my contact with ICSF. In 2000, Masifundise, a non-governmental organization working with rural communities, began engaging with



small-scale fishing communities in the Northern and Western provinces, those provinces within which the industrial fishing sector is most prominent. In 2002, Masifundise organized an international Fisher Forum at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and supported over 100 men and women fisher representatives in attending the event. The organization invited representatives from ICSF and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples to attend the Fisher Forum, and it was here that many of these fishers were exposed to fishers from other countries, for the first time. It was here that I first met Chandrika Sharma and was inspired by ICSF's approach. The fishers' returned to their homes invigorated by the international fishworker movement's potential, and began initiatives to organize themselves. Several strong women leaders who had attended that event were particularly inspired and expressed their determination to ensure that women's voices were heard in this process. I assisted them in writing up their stories in *Yemaya* (see *Yemaya* November 2002) and this international exposure further inspired their determination to strengthen their leadership roles.

BUILDING LOCAL COASTAL AND GENDER-BASED LINKS

During the following two years, I and one another woman member of the field staff programme within Masifundise, supported strongly by Mercia Andrews, the Director of Masifundise's parent body, the Trust for Community Outreach and Education, supported women from one region in establishing a West Coast Women's Network. The objective of the network was to enable women within small-scale fishing communities to organize around the issues within their communities that impacted them specifically, such as gender-based violence, but within the broader context of the links between their gender oppression and the oppressive patriarchal and capitalist relations within the fishing industry, which dominated social relations within these coastal towns.

Although I made some attempt to facilitate the development of a feminist approach to this organizing work, in reality, the 'gender mainstreaming' approach that was at its height within donor and government institutions at that time shaped the approach to the network. There was no support for a feminist approach from the male fieldworker



colleagues within the organization and we two women interested in these issues did not have the luxury of time to advocate and fight for a deepened feminist political consciousness within the organization. The organization was under-resourced, and we were swept along with the focus on supporting the general struggle for small-scale fishers' recognition. Similarly, the women fishers' voices were drowned within the louder call for solidarity in the struggle for small-scale fishers' rights. 'Fishers' rights' assumed a gender neutrality that was rarely questioned in the face of the common enemy of the (still) discriminating State and racially based industry.



ICSF'S STRATEGY FOR WOMEN IN FISHERIES SUPPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA

ICSF support to women-in-fisheries work, like that of most of ICSF's work, took its direction from the capacity and content of the work of the local ICSF membership. Through my exposure to ICSF's WIF programme, I was able to gradually insert key references to women in fisheries at certain opportune moments in the organizing work. This was facilitated by the fact that several of the leaders from small-scale fishing communities were powerful women. While they did not initially voice their identity as 'women in fisheries', this aspect of their identity gradually gained strength, but it was largely encouraged by my attempts to keep it alive and to consciously encourage the articulation of women-in-fisheries issues.

Within the NGO itself, there was little space for discussions about women's oppression at the organizational level or institutionally within the sector. Instead, 'gender equality' became an easy 'add-on' principle within the policy discussions and debates, without it



being interrogated in any depth among the staff or fishing leaders. Gender equality was part of the rhetoric of the day, an assumption among civil society working towards deepening democracy, but it was the donor-led, international human-rights-based and packaged version of 'gender equity' that was smoothly inserted into the funding proposals and programme planning that were implemented.

Similarly, within the growing organization of Coastal Links, the community-based network of small-scale fishing organizations established by Masifundise, the focus of 'women in fisheries' gradually became restricted to 'violence against women', and the links between women's structural powerlessness, both in the private and the public sphere, were not consolidated, as they were seldom articulated. This was furthered by the active expression of anti-feminist statements by the leader of the Artisanal Fishers Association, who challenged me and accused me -- in a series of emails that he circulated within the international small-scale fisheries movement -- of importing Western feminist ideas into the local fisheries. At the time, there had been almost no research work done on women's structural position within the fishing industry, even within the organized labour sector, and, to date, this remains an extremely under-researched, invisible issue in political and intellectual work.

FALLING THROUGH THE NET

The fact that the fishers' struggle was led by several strong women from local communities helped to create the illusion that the demand for women's equality was somehow inherent in the demand for fishers' rights, and that the slogan **"Fishers' rights = Human Rights"** that was adopted in 2006 as part of the Equality Court case somehow included women's rights. The centrality of women leaders in the struggle has been observed but is little understood. Women themselves suggest that it is due to the fact that men do not have time to take up the struggles because they are fishing – but, in a context where men argued that they had been excluded from access to the sea, this was ironic. Instead, it is suggested that taking on the bulk of the administrative aspects of advocacy and organizing was seen as an extension of the 'ordinary' unpaid labour that many women



had been doing in their communities and households anyway. Since many young men were forced to leave school at an early age to go and work at sea in order to support their families, many women from fishing communities in the Northern and Western Cape had the relative advantage of a few extra years of education. This, in addition to more experience in interacting with authorities such as schools and health clinics, enabled the women to take up this work more easily than some of their male counterparts who expressed reluctance to undertake this sort of work. Many of the women from these communities are thus more articulate and more comfortable expressing themselves verbally than the fishermen.

A contradiction thus existed in that women had historically not been viewed as 'fishers' because, in that province, the majority of them were not directly involved in harvesting marine resources, or had not been for some years because of the restrictions on subsistence fishing, and yet they were now speaking on behalf of traditional fishers. That contradiction was glossed over at the time in the face of the sense of urgency to get 'fishers' rights' recognized. Women were at the forefront of the defiance campaign that finally forced the State to agree to the Equality Court Order in May 2007 and to begin negotiations about a new small-scale policy that would accommodate the fishers' rights. The Chairperson of Coastal Links, at the time, was a woman leader from one of the more historic fishing communities.

When, in 2007, nominations for fisher representatives on the newly established National Policy Task Team were made, the fishers nominated a popular male leader as their representative, not the woman Chairperson of Coastal Links. Initially, there was no specific woman representative on the Task Team, and the women themselves did not comment on this or advocate for a specific woman representative.

In 2008, however, in the midst of all the policy development work, ICSF offered to support a WIF workshop for Masifundise. The idea germinated in the fact that I, as the ICSF Member within Masifundise, would be able to facilitate the workshop with a colleague, Rose Telela, another feminist, who had also visited ICSF and had engaged with the WIF literature at the ICSF Documentation Centre. Rose and I developed a popular WIF pamphlet called *Women's Net*, also funded by ICSF, in which we tried to integrate the



feminist understanding of women in fisheries developed by Nalini Nayak, Cornelia Quist and others within ICSF, making links between the public and private spheres of women's lives and their structural oppression. That pamphlet was translated into the local language spoken by the fishers and served as the basis for the content of the workshop.

In retrospect, it seems that the workshop content we developed perhaps erred on the side of overemphasizing a normative human-rights framework, locating women's rights within an international framework, rather than starting with a slow, but steady, grounded approach that helped the women themselves make the links between what they were experiencing at home and 'on the boats' and their oppression as women. This sort of 'fast-forward' approach of introducing the women to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other human-rights instruments, including the Equality Clause in the South Africa Constitution, is convenient because the cost of bringing together a group of women from up and down the coast is prohibitive, and so workshop time is very limited. However, pedagogically and from an organizing strategy perspective, it is now clear that local-level work with a facilitator might be a more sustainable strategy in the longer term.





Nonetheless, the workshop built up morale, and the women did develop a powerful Statement; they also took a decision to push for a representative on the National Task Team, which they subsequently implemented. The person they selected, however, had little exposure to gender work and although she was able to make powerful statements, she was unable to help in consolidating the actual policy proposals regarding women's rights vis-à-vis the proposed policy.

Sally Engle Merry, in her instructive article on the role of human-rights translators, notes that **“whether the rights layer of understanding endures or not depends, in part, on the institutional response claimants receive”** (Merry 2006:44). This certainly seems to have been the case in the South African context, where the women received very little substantive support for their rights claims at both the organizational and institutional levels. It is noticeable that the women leaders from Coastal Links who have all travelled to international meetings where the rights of women fishers have been discussed in the context of a human-rights-based approach have come back inspired, and have highlighted that aspect, but have then failed to take it further within Coastal Links and within the context of the new policy.



At the time, I was acutely aware of the contradiction between the level of gender awareness and the more feminist approach that she was inserting into the pamphlet and the workshop content and proceedings. I felt caught between trying to project a forward-looking, progressive policy agenda, which would assert certain rights of women, within the constraints of very limited capacity, with the hope that it would resonate with the women, despite moving at a slower pace, and possibly ‘missing this policy moment’. There was little space within the organization to discuss these strategies and the ethical dilemmas of such work. To an



extent, this tension appears inevitable within the already contradictory position of an NGO worker acting as a catalyst for change within a movement that should ideally be led by the fishers' themselves, with supplementary support from the NGO.

In the policy discussions, the team was prepared to include 'gender equity' as a key principle, alongside racial and other forms of equity, but little, if any, time was allocated for discussions on the mechanisms whereby this policy principle would actually be operationalized, and what it would mean in practice. As a Task Team member representing the NGO, I forwarded some 'gender' text to the policy drafters, some of which was incorporated into the final draft. However, that also now appears to have been a mistake as there is now a complete disjoint between what the majority of the fishers on the ground (male) want and what the draft policy says. The fishers do not understand the policy statement's plea that women must benefit equally, which is interpreted as if women must also get actual fishing rights. I had originally suggested that a range of value-adding pre- and post-harvest activities should be stimulated by the State to facilitate women's participation and ensure that they are able to benefit equally – this did not necessarily mean that women themselves who have previously not physically gone to sea, should now be forced to start going to sea. It did, however, mean that women should be encouraged to go if they choose to, and that the necessary training and facilities should be provided to make this possible.

DEVELOPING A GENDER AGENDA

In 2010, ICSF again funded a Masifundise workshop aimed at preparing for the WIF workshop in India and continuing to support the women-in-fisheries work in South Africa. That workshop came at an opportune moment as it enabled the women to deepen their discussions about the gender content of the new draft policy.

At this workshop, some progress was made in extending the women's understanding of the roles that they have historically played and the paid and unpaid labour that they have done in factories, in their homes, on the beaches and in their communities. The women articulated strongly the fact that they believed that they were the custodians of their



communities and that the individual quota system had destroyed the social fabric of the coastal communities. They demanded a community-based approach to rights allocation in the new policy as they felt that this was the only way in which they could be sure that they would benefit. This demand resonated with the discussions that Coastal Links was having about the approach in the new policy.

Although the workshop attempted to put on the table issues related to globalization and the current destructive development paradigm and model of fisheries growth, there was limited discussion about them. However, women did identify the links between a community-based approach and the demand for a livelihoods approach to fisheries. That workshop thus had a very positive outcome as it helped to give women from a number of communities a shared understanding of their advocacy demands in the coming policy months.

Nonetheless, the women have not been able to take it forward as a basis for further debate and development within Coastal Links and in terms of how to implement gender equity through the new policy. This section of the new draft policy remains very weak in current policy discussions. Although the woman leader from Coastal Links, who





participated actively in the ICSF workshop in India, gave feedback on the meeting to Coastal Links leaders, there has been no further follow-up on this work. I have now left the organization, and so there is now no capacity to take the work forward. The organization has recently employed two additional male field staff – which means that now all the field staff are male.

WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?

In the past year, since the ICSF-supported women-in-fisheries workshop, women's mobilization as women within Coastal Links appears to have diminished. Instead, several of the key women leaders in Coastal Links have used their positions of power to become controlling elites in their communities. Two of them work hand-in-hand with unscrupulous marketers, and have admitted to being involved in poaching for the benefits that they personally derive 'under the table'. Two of the main women leaders have organized rights for themselves, even though it is common knowledge that they do not personally harvest marine resources, one of the primary criteria for the allocation of rights and an accepted principle within Coastal Links.

Where did we go wrong? On reflection, a number of weaknesses in the strategy used at different levels are apparent. While ICSF support, both financial and otherwise to individual members, for organizational work at the national level, is important, in this instance, I think that I was perhaps too ambitious in thinking that this level of work could be sustained in a context in which I had little organizational support; in retrospect, perhaps this work should not have been undertaken.

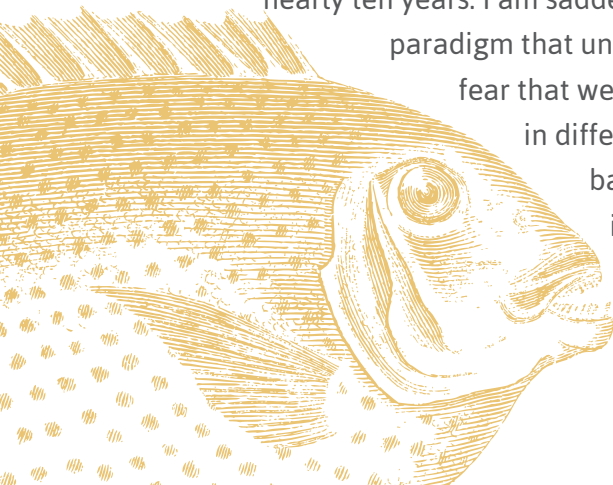
My own exposure to the human-rights discourse and the attempt to expose women in fisheries in South Africa to it has also perhaps led to the inadvertent silencing of local-level, culturally appropriate processes that might have enabled the women to make the links between their experiences of oppression and patriarchy, but at a slower, more consolidated pace. The trade-off between ensuring that gender issues were addressed in the new policy 'on paper', and actually ensuring that women have the organizational levels and consciousness that enable them to give substance to content are very apparent.



Our failure – mine and Masifundise’s — to establish the linkages between women’s struggles in the fisheries and their other struggles in their communities means that there is very little political consciousness of the ways in which the gender, race and class struggles in South Africa are inseparable. This consciousness is increasingly hard to build within the current culture of consumerism and anti-feminism. This failure appears to be as much a failure of the organisation to address its own gender culture as it is a failure of implementation strategy. In this sense, the organizational work of Coastal Links mirrors the structures, processes and content of Masifundise’s own identity. In this regard the NGO, in attempting to support the establishment of Coastal Links as an autonomous community-based organization, has an important responsibility to reflect the values and vision that it hopes Coastal Links will aspire to.

However, despite these apparent weaknesses, certain gains have been made. Masifundise and Coastal Links, in repeatedly asserting the need for ‘gender equity’ within the policy processes, have, at least, gained some space within which women from fishing communities can now move and begin to shape the vision for women in fisheries. In doing so, it is likely that Coastal Links and Masifundise will continue to look to organizations such as ICSF for guidance and support in determining the ways in which women’s rights can be consolidated and women’s work valorised. Towards this end it is clear that the work that ICSF is now undertaking in contributing towards a global instrument on small-scale fisheries will be critical in giving content not only to the rights of women fishers but in securing the vision for small-scale fishing communities articulated in the agenda that was developed at the ICSF WIF Workshop in 2010 and in securing a socially just, equitable and livelihoods-orientated fisheries.

I am ambivalent about my own role in the ICSF WIF programme of work over the past nearly ten years. I am saddened by the lack of real progress in changing the paradigm that underlies the approach to fisheries in South Africa, and I fear that we are headed for more of the same, only merely dressed in different language – an approach to fisheries that is actually based on a conceptualization of ‘fishing community’ that is located within existing, very individualistic, capitalist and patriarchal social relations.





I appreciate very deeply the opportunities to meet and develop a strong sense of solidarity and friendship with several of the women fishers from coastal communities in South Africa and with women within the ICSF network. I have learnt, and continue to learn, a great deal from them. Several of the women leaders in South Africa have said that the women-in-fisheries work here has inspired them and helped them on a personal level, even where it is still hard for them to address issues in the public domain.

I do, however, feel culpable of running ahead with my own agenda in a context in which I felt lonely and powerless. The ICSF WIF programme enabled me to create a space in which I felt less powerless. It linked me closely to the work and shared experiences of Nalini, Cornelie, Chandrika and others in ICSF, and that solidarity enabled me to cope with the powerlessness and lack that I experienced locally. But it was not sufficiently rooted in, nor led by, a local process – despite it being Rule Number One on my list of rules for any development worker and activist.

I think my work reflects my own internalized acceptance of this very individualism that I am so critical of in the leaders around me. The opportunity to reflect on the women-in-fisheries work and my own work within that area is thus deeply challenging for me.

I remain inspired and encouraged by ICSF's commitment to continue to do this work and, particularly, by the work of the women in the organization who are determined that we find opportunities to reflect on, share and refine our strategies together.



Workshop on
Recasting the Net
Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining

PARTICIPANTS AT THE 'RECASTING THE NET:
DEFINING A GENDER AGENDA FOR
SUSTAINING LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS IN
FISHING COMMUNITIES' WORKSHOP, IN 2010





SHARED GENDER AGENDA

THE PROCESS

Thirty-nine participants from 18 countries, including women fishworkers, representatives of fishworker organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), activists and researchers, met at Mahabalipuram, India, during 7-10 July 2010, to discuss the theme **“Recasting the Net: Defining a Gender Agenda for Sustaining Life and Livelihoods in Fishing Communities”**.

Informed by reports of national and regional workshops and consultations held in preparation for the workshop—from India, Thailand, the Philippines, South Africa, Brazil, Europe and Canada—and by experiences from Guinea Conakry, Chile and Tanzania, participants discussed and analyzed key issues facing women fishworkers and small-scale and artisanal fishing communities, as well as the strategies being adopted by them to assert their rights and defend their interests.

A presentation, based on a review of literature, analyzed the major shifts that have taken place over the last three decades in the dominant discourse on women in the small-scale fisheries. The first was a shift in focus from political economy to political ecology, which, while allowing a significant critique of the industrial model of development to emerge, obscured, over time, the analysis of women's labour in the sector. The second was the shift from opposition to women's oppression to an individual-centric gender-empowerment agenda, which dissociated gender from other structures of power. The third was the increasing emphasis on a human-rights framework, which obscured both community and women's rights. Finally, there has been a growing dependence on donor aid for both social action and research. Given that destructive industrial fishing practices have been introduced in the South chiefly through aid tied to structural adjustment policies, and given further that donor aid is increasingly aligning itself with the imperatives of globalization, this dependence is problematic.



Participants at the workshop also discussed international legal instruments of relevance to women in fisheries, with a special focus on the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action**, and deplored their poor implementation. They heard presentations on the Programme on Fisheries and Aquaculture for Poverty Alleviation and Food Security of the **Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations (**FAO**) and the proposal for an international instrument on small-scale fisheries that may be considered by the **Committee on Fisheries (COFI)** of the FAO.

Participants worked in groups to consolidate their “dreams” about fisheries that would sustain life and livelihoods in fishing communities, and to define an agenda for action to realize these dreams. They agreed on the analysis and shared agenda detailed below.

A SHARED AGENDA FOR SUSTAINING LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS IN FISHING COMMUNITIES

Women are an integral part of small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishing communities. Yet, their work and labour continue to remain invisible. Specific forms of discrimination cut across all aspects of women’s lives—their labour, sexuality and their fertility—undermining their dignity, sense of self-worth and self-confidence. It is women’s labour, unpaid or poorly paid, which sustains the existing model of development. The existing model of development is also based on the unsustainable extraction of natural resources. This is leading to environmental degradation and the poisoning of waters and lands, eroding the very basis of the lives and livelihoods of inland and coastal fishing communities, including indigenous communities, while increasing women’s burden of unremunerated work. Fishing communities today increasingly face displacement from their lands and their fishing grounds due to, among other things, mega-projects related to oil and gas exploration, wind farms, tourism, commercial aquaculture and port development, which are being promoted by large corporations and some national governments. Displaced communities are forced to migrate in search of livelihood, facing heightened insecurity and vulnerability.



We are fully aware that if the logic of such development is not questioned and indiscriminate capital investment is not regulated, fishing communities and small-scale and artisanal fisheries will cease to exist. We are also fully aware of the need to defend the role and contribution of small-scale and artisanal fisheries to providing livelihood, employment and food security in a sustainable manner, into the future.

OUR DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

We dream of a future in which:

- **aquatic ecosystems are free of pollution, retaining their ability to regenerate living resources, sustain livelihoods and meet food security;**
- **interaction with natural resource are based on principles of sustainability and a respect for the rhythms and limits of nature;**
- **interactions within communities and with society are based on principles of equality, social justice and mutuality;**
- **there is respect for the diversity of ecosystems and communities and the recognition that this diversity is the basis for sustaining life and livelihoods;**
- **fishing communities, including women and children, are able to live their lives in peace and dignity, free of violence, and to enjoy decent living and working conditions;**
- **people have the right to work and to choose the work that they prefer, irrespective of the sexual division of labour, and all work, including reproductive work, is valued;**
- **the rights of fishing communities to their coastal lands, as well as the preferential access of small-scale and artisanal fishworkers and indigenous peoples to coastal and inland fisheries resources, are recognized;**
- **small-scale and artisanal fisheries are recognized for producing high-quality fish in a sustainable manner;**
- **fishing communities retain ownership and control over economic assets employed in fishing and fish processing and marketing operations;**
- **fishing communities have strong organizations, including producer organizations, enabling them to negotiate from positions of power, and in these organizations, women have central roles in decisionmaking;**



- **women engaged in fisheries activities have the first right to access the fish that is landed, and the marketing chain is restructured in equitable ways to privilege and valorize small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishworkers;**
- **power to manage coastal and fishery resources is devolved to local and indigenous communities, and their capacity to do so is strengthened;**
- **planning for small-scale and artisanal fisheries takes into consideration broader aquatic and coastal management issues, and where traditional and local knowledge, together with scientific knowledge, form the basis of fisheries management systems;**
- **the choice of fisheries conservation and management mechanisms and instruments are sensitive to principles of equity, social justice and solidarity;**
- **fisheries conservation and management mechanisms and instruments promote community-based management and incorporate approaches other than market-driven quota management systems;**
- **fishing communities have access to the information they need to participate in decisionmaking in an informed way; and**
- **basic economic, social, cultural and political rights are guaranteed by the State through a range of instruments, including the provision of social security, education and health facilities and a range of social and infrastructure assets for fishing communities.**

OUR AGENDA FOR ACTION

Based on these dreams, we propose the following action agenda for different sections of society:

HOUSEHOLDS AND COMMUNITIES

- **Strengthen the capacity of women to participate in fishworker movements and organizations.**
- **Challenge men's resistance to women's participation in organizations, where it exists, and ensure the sharing of household work.**
- **Enhance the capacity of communities, including through literacy programmes, information on aquatic ecology and access to appropriate technology.**
- **Secure an environment of safety and freedom from violence and sexual abuse within the household and community.**



- **Ensure that community-based organizations guarantee women's participation in decision-making processes and their access to resources such as fish and fish products.**
- **Recognize and assert the value of traditional and local knowledge, including that of women, as an important component in decision-making processes.**

FISHWORKER ORGANIZATIONS

- **Develop a culture in which all forms of discrimination are eliminated.**
- **Guarantee space and support for women to participate in decision-making processes, including those related to conservation and fisheries management.**
- **Address women's issues within organizations, and create separate spaces for women to organize autonomously at local, regional, national and international levels.**
- **Promote exchanges between women fishworkers and their organizations across different contexts.**
- **Raise awareness about, and participate actively in monitoring implementation of, international instruments, such as CEDAW.**
- **Challenge liberalization of global trade and the decisions of the World Trade Organization on patenting of food products, in particular, fish and fish products.**
- **Promote equitable and sustainable alternatives to existing models of development.**

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING NGOS, MEDIA, CONSUMERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS)

- **Promote awareness of the socioeconomic conditions and basic needs of fishing communities, especially of women and other marginalized groups.**
- **Respect and value traditional and local knowledge, and support efforts of fishing communities towards sustainable and equitable fisheries.**

RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

Taking cognizance of the shifts in the dominant discourse on women in fisheries, undertake research and analysis on:

- **the conditions and contributions of women in small-scale and artisanal fisheries and fishing communities, and make the findings widely accessible;**
- **the impact of development and conservation projects on the lives of men, women and children in fishing communities; and**
- **the impact of fisheries conservation and management measures on the lives and livelihoods of fishing communities.**



THE STATE

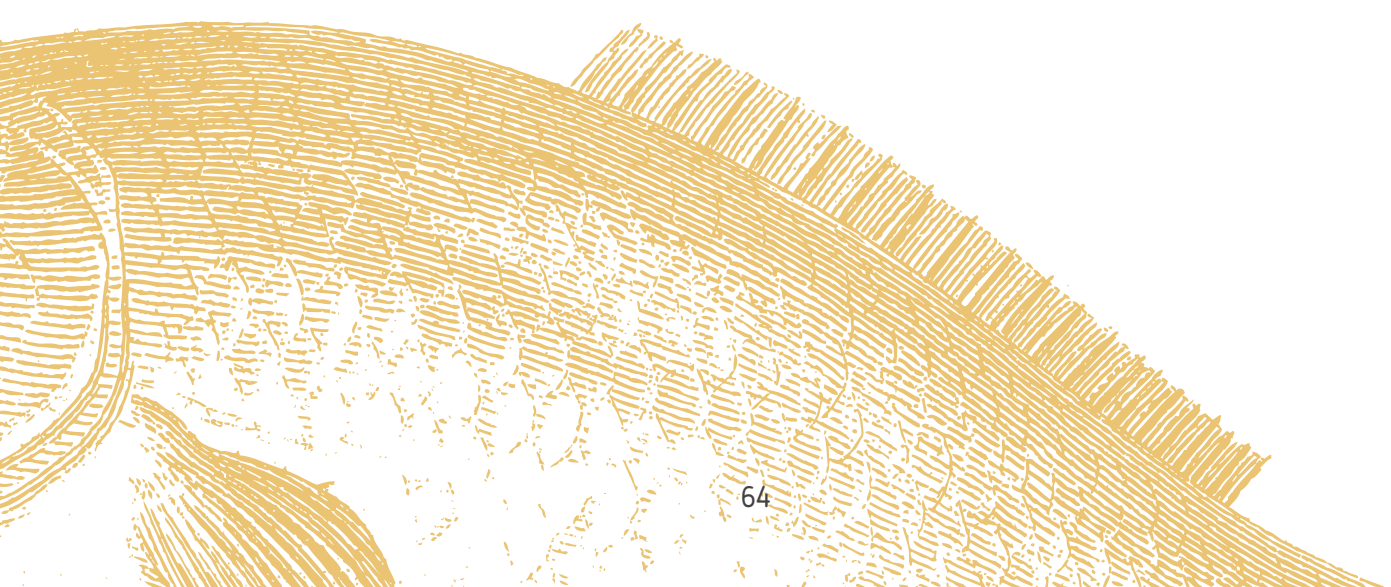
- **Guarantee access and control over resources by small-scale and artisanal fishers and their communities, with particular attention to women.**
- **Recognize and protect collective rights to the resources and territories on which fishing communities, including indigenous communities, have traditionally depended on for their food security and livelihoods.**
- **Guarantee universal health and social security and the socialization of housework, and protect existing systems of social security that have proven to be adequate.**
- **Guarantee safety, and assure freedom from violence and sexual abuse.**
- **Regulate markets, discouraging the concentration of capital, and promote local markets.**
- **Build the capacity of, and empower, fishing communities to manage their resources.**
- **Promote education and capacity-building of fishing communities based on local realities and a culture of non-discrimination.**
- **Ratify and fully implement human-rights instruments, in particular CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, by adopting specific measures to address discrimination against women, while creating spaces for civil society organizations, in particular for women fishworkers and their organizations, to participate in monitoring their implementation.**
- **Support and protect coastal and inland communities, with particular attention to women, in relation to natural disasters and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.**
- **Protect coastal communities from displacement or forced migration.**
- **Guarantee that both men and women of fishing communities are consulted and enabled to participate in decisionmaking, including in relation to fisheries conservation and management.**
- **Recognize and value traditional and local knowledge as an integral part of information required for fisheries conservation and management.**
- **Promote sustainable fisheries, mitigate pollution and reduce the impact of extractive industries such as oil and natural gas.**
- **Recognize workers in the informal sector, in particular, women, including as collaborative spouses, and guarantee their labour rights and their rights to decent work.**
- **Generate sex-disaggregated data on those who work in all aspects of fisheries, through census operations.**



INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Integrate an understanding of gender that shapes fisheries policies at various levels towards sustaining life and livelihoods in fishing communities.**
- **Desist from funding projects that are environmentally destructive and socially unjust, and that impose structural adjustment conditionalities (poverty reduction and growth facilities) on recipient States.**

We resolve to work together to ensure that this agenda is widely disseminated, incorporated and implemented at all levels, including in an international instrument on small-scale fisheries that may be considered by the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) of the FAO.





**INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE
IN SUPPORT OF FISHWORKERS**

www.icsf.net

ICSF is an international NGO working on issues that concern fishworkers the world over. It is in status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN and is on ILO's Special List of Non-governmental International Organizations. It also has Liaison Status with FAO. As a global network of community organizers, teachers, technicians, researchers and scientists, ICSF's activities encompass monitoring and research, exchange and training, campaigns and action, as well as communications.